OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1984

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:08 a.m., in room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Richard C. Shelby (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Shelby, Smith of New Jersey, and Sundquist.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN SHELBY

Mr. SHELBY. The subcommittee will come to order.

This morning we are meeting to review the National Cemetery System that is administered by the Veterans' Administration. The National Cemetery System traces its legal origins to the act of July 17, 1862, which authorized President Lincoln to purchase cemetery grounds for the interment of soldiers dying in service to their country. This country has therefore recognized its moral obligation to caring for those who have honorably served in our military forces since that time.

Under its present structure, however, the National Cemetery System will not be able to provide access to burial benefits for the veteran community to the degree which is consistent with the commitments, obligations, and responsibilities incumbent upon the Veterans' Administration.

Of the 109 operative national cemeteries, 51 are in closed status. Although the remaining 58 have ample gravesite resources, they are not appropriately located or distributed to effectively meet veterans' present or future burial needs. This is largely due to the evolutionary development of the system over more than 100 years. As many cemeteries were established immediately after the Civil War and some time thereafter, their size, scope, and location have no relationship to the needs of today's veteran population.

As most of you know, in compliance with the provisions contained in Public Law 93-43 which established the National Cemetery System as we know it today, the Veterans' Administration has achieved its objective of providing one large national cemetery for each of the 10 Standard Federal Regions and 1 for the Washington, DC, area, with the last cemetery in Fort Mitchell, AL, scheduled for completion in 1986.

The regional cemetery concept was adopted in an effort to establish an interim method of system expansion. This was done to respond to the recognized need for improvement of service through resource distribution. At that time, planners were aware of the localization of service provided by national cemeteries. In light of this knowledge, the expected end result could not have been the ultimate effective delivery of service to an area as large as a Standard Federal Region which comprises a number of States.

Interments in national cemeteries have generally increased each year since establishment, and during the next 15 years, as the peak period of demand is approached, veteran deaths in the Nation will continue to increase annually, while unoccupied gravesites in the National Cemetery System will be greatly reduced and scattered in location. The projected peak period is estimated at between the years 2000 and 2015, at which time the age 65 and over veteran group will increase from its present level of about 4 million to about 9 million people.

We are therefore at a crossroads where we must determine the direction of future expansion. I originally scheduled this hearing today to coincide with the proposed release of a VA study on the National Cemetery System. It is my understanding that this study was scheduled for completion in September, and I am most unhappy that it will not be available until later. I hope Mr. Bannai will be kind enough to make a few comments on its contents later.

Today we have seven witnesses appearing before the subcommittee, including three of my colleagues. Some prospective witnesses have submitted their statements, or plan to shortly. Without objection, all of your testimony will be submitted to the record, and the record will remain open for 5 days so that anyone else's testimony may be included in the hearing record.

I want to welcome all of you here this morning. Before we get started, I want to recognize my colleague from New Jersey, the ranking minority member, Mr. Smith.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the National Cemetery System of the Veterans' Administration is one of its most sensitive programs. Our subcommittee recognizes this, and that is why in our oversight capacity we seek to keep up-to-date with respect to all of its various elements.

Mr. Chairman, the President, in my opinion, will shortly sign our legislation, H.R. 5617, the Veterans' Housing Amendments of 1984, which contained, in part, a provision dealing with upright markers in our national cemeteries. In this connection, I was pleased to note that the VA recently addressed the issue by the issuance of a report that suggested it will do all that it can to make the new program work, even though it is opposed to it. I would hope our witnesses this morning will speak to the issue either in their direct testimony or in answer to questions raised by members of the subcommittee.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I know that we all take note of the untimely passing of Mr. Vincent Corrado, the Deputy Director of the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs. He was a giant in his profession and he will be sorely missed. I would like to join with you in sending our condolences to his wife and to his family. He was an excellent public servant and he had the great respect of both this subcommittee and the full committee.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SHELBY. I now recognize the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Sundquist.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to welcome our colleagues this morning and we look forward to the testimony.

I have a statement for the record, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

[The statement of Hon. Don Sundquist follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. DON SUNDQUIST, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TENNESSEE

Mr. Chairman, it is a great pleasure to be here today to hear the testimony of my Honorable colleague(s), as well as the thoughts and opinions of the VA and the various veteran organizations. The input you give to this committee is invaluable in dealing with a most important aspect of our veterans program. The treatment of our deceased veterans is of the utmost concern and we must be sure to treat them with the respect befitting one who has contributed to the welfare of our country. The issues of regional cemeteries and the State Cemetery Grants Program are of the utmost concern at a time when our veteran population is growing so rapidly. I am anxious to hear the feelings of those here today with respect to these issues so that we might, ultimately, do what is in the best interest of our veteran population.

Mr. SHELBY. Our first group consists of our colleagues from the House, the Honorable John McCain, Republican from Arizona, the Honorable Eldon Rudd, Republican from Arizona—I see a real interest, and not just a passing one, in Arizona for this—and also the Honorable Rod Chandler of the State of Washington, who does have an interest. We have just been out there to see some sites, as you well know.

Congressman McCain, do you want to start off the hearing? As I said, and as all of you know, without objection, all of your written statements will be included in the record. You may proceed as you choose.

STATEMENTS OF HON. JOHN McCAIN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA; HON. ROD CHANDLER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WASHINGTON; AND HON. ELDON RUDD, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN McCAIN

Mr. MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am extremely pleased to be with you today.

I would like to submit my statement for the record and excerpt from it for the sake of time.

I would also like to thank Congressman Rudd, a senior member from Arizona, and my colleague, Mr. Chandler, for being here on this issue that I feel is a very important one as far as our commitment to the veterans of America is concerned.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the act of 1973 created our present day National Cemetery System. Unfortunately, this concept has not provided adequate service to all veterans nationwide. You and the other subcommittee members are aware of the number of national cemeteries. I think it is important that I point out that an aging veteran population is sure to place heavy demand on the Sun Belt States as well as those areas which historically have provided health-related relief for the aging. An example of this unfortunate inequity is that a veteran located in the San Francisco area is served by the Riverside, CA regional cemetery, some 435 miles away. In fact, the study that you referred to earlier, Mr. Chairman, I believe will confirm the injustices that exist in the regional cemetery system today.

The bill I have introduced attempts to redirect our attention toward those areas with the greatest need. The Administrator of the VA would be required to place in priority those areas and plan for the establishment of cemeteries in at least 10 areas projected to have the greatest need. As you know, we are presently using this method to expand our veterans' health care facilities.

In light of present budgetary considerations, I feel it is important to note that those States with a national cemetery have traditionally donated land to the VA for that purpose. Additionally, the VA should consider the desirability and feasibility of acquiring existing State cemeteries for inclusion into the national system. This would preclude the necessity of the VA to make fair market value purchases of land, whether it be interagency transfers or State-owned land. By making these provisions, I feel confident that capital expenditures could be kept at a minimum.

Mr. Chairman, there is a certain comfort to the veteran in knowing that he will have the honor of being laid to rest in a national cemetery, a resting place close to his family members and his home. I think we all agree that the present day system does not provide this assurance for most of our Nation's veterans. I believe it is our responsibility as Members of Congress to ensure the commitment and obligation incumbent upon the Veterans' Administration.

I want to thank you again for having this hearing this morning.

[The statement of Hon. John McCain appears at p. 31.]

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. Chandler.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROD CHANDLER

Mr. CHANDLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank you very much for your interest in the State of Washington and for your visit there. I am sorry that I wasn't able to join you.

I, too, have a prepared statement, but in the interest of brevity, I will simply make a couple of points that I think are important for the committee.

First, some facts about our State. Washington State has the third largest veteran population per 1,000 civilians in the United States, about 150 veterans per 1,000 persons in the State. The State's total veteran population is almost 630,000, or 15 percent of the total State population. Then when you add widows and other dependents who would be eligible for benefits to that number, it totals 1 mil-

lion persons. The projected estimated number of Washington veteran deaths for the year 2000 is estimated to be approximately 13,000.

Yet our State now is not presently served by a veterans' cemetery. We do have in King County a site that is available and can be utilized almost immediately, if we can take advantage of it. It is located at the south end of the Seattle-Tacoma runway, an advantageous location for a cemetery because the land is suitable for a cemetery and not much else. It is ideally situated for a cemetery, and I want to commend the committee for taking a look at it.

I think, as Mr. McCain probably understands better than anybody in the Congress, we have a commitment to the veterans of the United States, and I think we have a commitment to the veterans of the State of Washington to provide this service for them. For your interest in this subject and your concern, I really want to thank you and Mr. Smith and Mr. Sundquist.

I would be very happy to answer any questions about this site or anything else, Mr. Chairman.

[The statement of Hon. Rod Chandler appears at p. 34.]

Mr. SHELBY. Congressman Rudd.

STATEMENT OF HON. ELDON RUDD

Mr. RUDD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you, as well as my good friends and distinguished members of the committee, for what you are doing in this oversight effort to try to see in what way we can solve our problems. I want to assure you that we are here to try to help you solve those problems in every way possible.

I want you to know that I share your concerns and the concerns of Arizona veterans for the interest and to propound the lack of a national cemetery in Arizona and the need for it. Last year, with the support of my good friends in the delegation—Congressman McCain and the other members of the delegation, the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars—I introduced H.R. 1906, a bill, which I hope you will consider favorably, to establish a national veterans cemetery in Arizona on the existing site of the Arizona Memorial Cemetery because of its strategic location. It is near Cave Creek in Arizona.

I want to tell you that very little attention is paid to the population explosion in Arizona, but in 1970 we had about 250,000 veterans in Arizona. Today it has doubled, and in the next 15 years it will double again. So you can see that, along with the growth of the State itself, the veteran population is growing right along with it, and even more so ratio-wise.

The nearest national cemetery available for burial space is over 300 miles away in the city of Riverside, CA. It is very inconvenient for the number of veterans that we have, and their families, to travel that distance.

In 1976, with the help of Federal matching funds from Public Law 95-476, the State of Arizona established the Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Maricopa County. It has about 836 acres of raw desert land, and the terrain is very admirable and most suitable for the requirements of a national cemetery.

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I appreciate the existence of that memorial cemetery and the help that you provided for it, but I am very concerned that veterans who have served honorably in defense of our Nation should have the right and opportunity to be buried in a national veterans cemetery within a reasonable distance of their homes and families. Let me emphasize again that the cemetery closest to us is 300 miles away. It is a long distance for the families of those who are buried to visit the remains of their loved ones.

While there is a current need for a national veterans cemetery in Arizona, again I want to emphasize the tremendous population explosion that is taking place there, not only in citizens who are not veterans but among the veterans themselves. This space has room for about 500,000 interments, which would make it probably the largest in the National Cemetery System if you decide to designate it to be that. So with the diminishing space that is occurring across the Nation for national cemeteries, I think this would be an important consideration for the site there in Arizona and I certainly urge your favorable consideration of that site for a national cemetery.

I would like unanimous consent to insert my comments into the record.

Mr. SHELBY. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. RUDD. Again let me thank you, and also to thank my colleagues present, especially Congressman McCain. I guess most of us are veterans, but let me just emphasize that I appreciate his support in this effort. He is a tried veteran and spent a career in the U.S. Navy, a heroic career, with almost a third of it being spent in a prison camp. So his support is very much appreciated by me and I am sure everyone else.

I would like to extend an invitation to you all to visit Arizona, to take a look at this site and see for yourselves what a unique site it would be and how good a site it would be. I would like to offer my aid in any way possible to help you arrange such a visit in inquiry. I know your deliberations are going to be long and maybe difficult. I would like to try to make it as easy for you as possible.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you very much for the privilege of being here with you this morning.

[The statement of Hon. Eldon Rudd appears at p. 36.]

Mr. SHELBY. Thank you.

I first want to compliment Congressman McCain for introducing his bill. I think it is a good piece of legislation.

The other thing that both of you pointed out, you and Congressman Rudd, is that it is obvious Arizona is an exploding population area. It is obvious when the veteran population doubles from 250,000 to 500,000 in 10 or 11 years. It is moving fast.

I do want to—and I hope my colleague from New Jersey will join me—to visit Arizona, as Congressman McCain mentioned earlier, and as you just mentioned, Congressman Rudd, because we have already visited in the State of Washington. I think we would get a lot out of it.

I would also like to comment on our visit to the State of Washington. We flew over the site when we visited there. I believe some of your aides were with us.

Mr. CHANDLER. Yes.

Mr. SHELBY. But there is already in that same area at the Seattle-Tacoma airport, as you well know, a private cemetery. There is land there also, and probably one of the best uses would be for another cemetery. It is a beautiful location. I told the people in Seattle I think it has possibilities. We all know that establishing a cemetery is difficult and it is a laborious task to get it done, but there is a need.

Congressman Smith.

Mr. SMITH. I just would like to compliment all three of my friends and colleagues on their testimony and on their introduction of legislation to accomplish what they perceive to be a very real and pressing need in Arizona and Washington.

I was wondering if either gentleman from Arizona might just touch on how the matching funds have worked with regard to the State grant program. I know there is a cemetery in Arizona, I believe established in 1976. Is that not meeting the need, in your opinion?

Mr. RUDD. Everything is working out very well so far. But there is a wild clamor, if you will, to make this a national cemetery in Arizona by the veterans themselves and by their families. That is the reason I introduced the bill that I did. Congressman McCain's bill looks at the whole picture and does a very good job. I believe it's No. 8 in need, something like that, according to the last survey. But I am sure if you took another look at it, that figure would jump much higher. I am willing to provide any information that you need for the record, and again, I hope you will come to Arizona to take a look at it. The raw desert land makes it along the lines the chairman was just talking about, a very unique and very desirable site for this type of operation.

Mr. SMITH. I think the chairman makes a good point about the need for an onsite visit to further explore this. I hope that can be arranged in the very near future.

I do thank you for your testimony.

Mr. MCCAIN. If I may comment just briefly, I would also like to thank my colleague, Mr. Rudd, who has been working on this since the first day he came to Congress. He has worked very hard on it. I think we have gotten as far as we have as far as the State matching funds due to his efforts.

I think the State matching funds have worked out fairly well, but I don't see that we will have the funds, nor the intention from the State level, that is going to be required for the numbers of veterans that will be buried there. They simply aren't capable of doing so.

Also, as you know, there are certain differences between a national and a State cemetery that make it a great deal more attractive. We already are having some difficulties in these days of budget crunches and having enough moneys available.

I also would like to point out, if I could, in this legislation I am not trying to focus on a single State, in that I believe this need is widespread. Just as we are unable to build a VA hospital in every single State or every single locality, even though we would like to, we are now placing our facilities where there is, through studies, the greatest need. I believe throughout the Sun Belt and a couple of other places in the country we are seeing the greatest need. That

is why I proposed this legislation. Although it would place Arizona as No. 8 or No. 9, it would still focus on those areas where there is a need for the national cemeteries and if, indeed, some day the moneys become available, we can just go right down the list for all 50 States. But I think it is important to put the grease where the wheel is squeaking, and right now it is in the areas like Arizona, where our veterans' population is so dramatically growing.

I thank you and I share Eldon's desire to have you come to Arizona. We recommend between the months of October and April, but it is certainly up to you when you would like to come.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. McCain, has the VA made any comments regarding your bill, H.R. 5988?

Mr. MCCAIN. I think the veterans' groups are a little bit of a problem because they, of course, would not particularly want to favor one State over another. I believe that the VA study which the chairman commented on, which has not been released yet, will indicate that the regional system has not nearly satisfied the intent of the legislation as it was originally passed and something has to be done. Whether they will endorse this specific proposal or not, I'm not sure, but I believe the study will indicate the original system as it is today is not satisfactory.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. SHELBY. I would like to make one quick comment regarding the State of Washington. It is my further understanding, Congressman Chandler, that VA officials have seen the site you mentioned and that I followed up on in Washington. Perhaps later this morning they could comment on the prospects there, or at least explain to the committee just how they go about acquiring land for the establishment of national cemeteries.

Mr. CHANDLER. Mr. Bannai was there. I accompanied him on a visit. The Port of Seattle and King County officials were along. So he will be able to fill you in on that.

Mr. SHELBY. I thought you would be interested in it. I know the committee would be.

Mr. CHANDLER. Yes.

Mr. SHELBY. Congressman Sundquist.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to compliment each of our colleagues on their testimony and their interest in an area that I think we all need to focus on. I, too, am disappointed that that study is not yet ready.

I have two questions for anybody who would like to respond. Do you think the regional concept is working? Congressman McCain touched on that a little bit, but your legislation, you could interpret it either that it ought to be prioritized by region, or that it ought to be prioritized by need?

Mr. RUDD. Well, the bill that my colleague has introduced I think addresses that question and shows the need for it. But I think need is the real problem.

Mr. MCCAIN. Where I think the regional system has failed, Mr. Sundquist, is that it did not take into account the movement of our population that is taking place, particularly in the last 15 to 20 years, from one part of the country to the other, which then has certainly not underburdened existing VA cemeteries, national

cemeteries, but it certainly hasn't been able to cope with the dramatic growth in other areas.

Although the regional system as originally designed appeared to be satisfactory, it has not coped with the demographic phenomena which we have experienced in the last 15 years. I would not say that we have to do away completely with the regional system. Each region must be addressed and certainly not ignored. I think, in addition to that, we have got to look at where our veterans are moving and where they are dying, where they want to be interred. That is why the question of need is so important a factor which was not taken into account when the regional system was set up, in my opinion.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. You also mention in your testimony that we're doing that, in effect, in the health care area and that there is a precedent for your legislation.

Mr. MCCAIN. Absolutely. It is unfortunate that we cannot build a VA hospital in every community in America, so we again have to look at where the veterans are and where the need is.

As I said, this is not combined, I believe you would agree, as far as health care facilities, to the Sun Belt. I was recently in Minneapolis where they opened a very attractive new VA hospital, and there are other parts of the country where existing facilities are being replaced as well as new ones being built. I hope that this legislation would not preclude any existing national cemeteries being cared for or new ones set up anywhere where they are needed.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. So often legislation doesn't make sense, but yours does make sense, and I compliment you.

Mr. MCCAIN. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. SUNDQUIST. I would be glad to yield.

Mr. SMITH. I was just wondering, Mr. McCain, as a follow up to the question of my colleague. In establishing priorities, do you track the health care facilities or do you track requests for interment in national cemeteries? I was wondering how you came up with your priority list.

Mr. MCCAIN. A study that we had some preliminary information on indicated that the World War I and II and aging veteran, many of whom are actuarily reaching the age where they're going to be eligible for entry into a cemetery, large numbers have moved from the Midwest and Northeast for retirement purposes to a lot of the Sun Belt area, which has then dramatically increased the need for interment in those areas. My understanding is that this study will indicate that that shift is definitely taking place.

Mr. SMITH. How many new cemeteries would you estimate would be required?

Mr. MCCAIN. I think that we have to almost open end it as appropriations become available. In other words, again, like the VA health facilities, I think we have to have a priority list of States and the first State with the greatest need would receive the appropriations, as available, and just go down the list. I think it would be a mistake to authorize funding for all 50, obviously, because that would be unrealistic, and that's why I think we have to focus on prioritizing. I don't know how you prioritize better than on a basis of need.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Mr. Rudd, one question.

The State cemetery that is there now for veterans, that you helped arrange and find the funds for—and you are to be complimented for your tenacity there—if that was turned over to the Federal Government, would that cost the Federal Government any money or would it just be turned over? I am speaking about the fee for the land itself.

Mr. RUDD. I can't give you any details on that on behalf of the State, but I'm sure that it would be just a turnover. We would have to work out the details on it and it would not be unfavorable.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. I note that Arizona has no Federal veterans cemetery, and Arizona is one of the fastest growing States in the country.

Mr. RUDD. That's right, we do not have.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you very much.

Mr. SHELBY. One other question to the two gentlemen from Arizona.

The land you are speaking of, is it a specific site in Arizona?

Mr. MCCAIN. Yes, our State cemetery is. As Congressman Rudd mentioned, it is north of Phoenix, which by the way is where about 60 percent of the State resides. So it would also be a very good place for the location of a national cemetery.

Mr. SHELBY. How large a tract is it?

Mr. RUDD. Eight-hundred and thirty-some acres.

Mr. SHELBY. That's a lot of land.

Mr. RUDD. But it would provide for 500,000 interments, or more. It is very well located, on east-west routes, and it would provide an additional necessary facility in my estimation.

Mr. SHELBY. Gentlemen, I thank all of you for coming today. We do look forward to following up on the Arizona bill.

Our next witness is Mr. Paul Bannai, Chief Memorial Affairs Director, Veterans' Administration. Mr. Bannai, if you would be seated at the table.

Mr. Bannai, your written testimony will be submitted to the record and made a part of the record, without objection. As always, you may comment orally.

STATEMENT OF PAUL T. BANNAI, CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BANNAI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to first say that, on behalf of Mr. Walters, I thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning. I want to thank Mr. Smith for his comments. We had the services for Mr. Corrado a week ago on Monday. A great number of his friends did attend, and I will take your remarks back to the Department.

The prepared text that we have presented to you I will not go through. However, I did want to point out several things that we have accomplished in the past year. There was the dedication of our 109th cemetery in Fort Richardson, AK the dedication of the regional cemetery which took place last weekend in Fort Custer, MI. This was attended by more than 1,600 people, a very moving

and patriotic event and supported by the people in the State of Michigan as well the surrounding States.

We have reopened Bay Pines National Cemetery in Florida, and I will make more comments on that. Of course, we have extended and expanded various cemeteries throughout the United States where we found additional land, such as Florence, SC, Bath, NY, Springfield, MO, and we are working on the acquisition of land at Grafton WV, which has been closed for well over 20 years.

In regard to the comments that you have made today relative to the regional concept, we have finished a study on this subject and have reviewed it within the agency to be gone over. However, we have sent it over to the Office of Management and Budget and we're waiting for their, shall we say, approval to release it to the public or whoever would be interested. We were hoping that that would have been by the meeting today, but we have not gotten permission for that, nor have they returned the text we sent to them.

As you know, with the opening of the cemetery in your State, Mr. Chairman, we will have achieved the regional cemetery concept in the 10 Federal regions. Incidentally, in speaking with the architect-engineer, we are a little ahead of schedule on that and we're hopeful that in October 1986 we will have that cemetery in Alabama opened.

Our interments are rising throughout our cemeteries. Part of it is due to the use of the "garden niche" plan, the use of closed cemeteries for the interment of cremated remains, and, of course, opening up cemeteries which heretofore have been closed.

In the State cemetery grant program which was mentioned, we have already obligated over $9.9 million for establishment or improvement of veterans' cemeteries in seven of the States. We just had a groundbreaking at Connecticut. Incidentally, we also will have a State grant cemetery in New Jersey that Mr. Smith is aware of.

I might mention also there will be another new cemetery coming on-line after Alabama, in Florida. We have been down there and met with the architect-engineers, and we hope that will be ready for us in the spring of 1987. Our goal is to provide sufficient gravesites for the veterans, presently and in the future. This is one of the things we're trying very hard to do. I think we are meeting this goal, with a few exceptions. Those exceptions I am sure I will be questioned on and I will dwell on them as we get into the questions.

Thank you.

[The statement of Paul T. Bannai appears at p. 40.]

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. Bannai, I thought I would just mention at this time and express my condolences for the loss of your associate, Vince Corrado. He was well known to this committee and I know we, and all those who work with the VA, will miss him. I know you will.

Mr. BANNAI. Thank you.

Mr. SHELBY. What has been the real holdup on Fort Mitchell, AL as far as the development of the cemetery? I know it's on-line for October 1986 and it's under construction. But it seems to me it has taken a long time to get that moving.

Mr. BANNAI. Well, I think it's mostly the transfer of the land. As you know, first there was a question of whether we could use it. The State had to transfer other land. After that, they found areas which were not usable for a cemetery due to the historical significance and that portion was taken out. I think from then on the architect-engineers have been working on schedule. From the date we started, I would estimate we're 6 months ahead from the time we were able to say these are the boundaries of the cemetery.

Mr. SHELBY. It is my understanding that your forthcoming study will discuss the regionalization concept and whether or not it is really working. Do you feel it is working the way it was intended, and if not, would you care to comment on it?

Mr. BANNAI. I was not privy to the setting of the 10 regional areas. It works in the areas where the regional cemetery is placed, where population centers are located. The regional cemetery concept does not work when we have placed cemeteries away from population centers.

We have now, as I say, nine of the 10 cemeteries in place. If you were to look at those figures, you can see that the regional cemeteries which are located where people are and where veterans are, are very, very busy cemeteries. Others, however, were placed on the basis of being in the geographic center of whatever was felt to be the region and away from population centers, and these are less active.

I can give you an example. For instance, the national cemetery in Massachusetts, unfortunately, is 60 or 70 miles from Boston. It's away from where people are. It's in a good resort area, but we don't have the people close by.

Another example is Indiantown Gap, PA I'll be going up there to brief them this Friday. It's between two large population centers that really need a cemetery, Pittsburgh, PA and the population of Philadelphia, PA toward the eastern end. It is a hundred-and-some miles from each point. The only large city is Harrisburg, which is probably 30 minutes, 20 or 30 minutes away. We do not have an interment rate there that compares with the other areas.

I told you about the dedication of Fort Custer, MI. We have several smaller cities, Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, but we're not serving Chicago, Detroit, or the larger metropolitan areas. In contrast to that, let's take Calverton, NY, which is on Long Island. We do approximately 40 to 50 interments every single day there, and people are willing to drive that freeway out there. Riverside, CA, even though it's over an hour, about 65 or 70 miles from the population of Los Angeles, we're doing about 25 to 30 interments every single day.

I could go down all the rest of the cemeteries which are in what you would call metropolitan areas. Kansas City, MO, Houston, TX, Denver, CO, Portland, OR, they all do a tremendous number of interments because they're right within the center of metropolitan areas. So that just points out that when you do set a cemetery up, if you have it where veterans are, it will be used.

Mr. SHELBY. I notice that you're changing your regulation whereby eligibility for burial of a dependent in a national cemetery is not contingent on the interment of the veteran in the same or another

national cemtery. In view of limited space, why has this regulation been changed?

For example, let's say that a veteran becomes a widower on more than one occasion. Do you put a limit on how many wives can be buried in the national cemetery without benefit of the assurance to the VA that the veteran plans on being buried there?

Is that a problem, or is it just a potential problem?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, I don't know what you're addressing, but the wives are eligible for burial in a national cemetery. The way the law is written, we are burying wives, if they predecease the veteran, in the cemetery of their choice. Later on, when the veteran passes away, he does not have to be buried there. But that's the way the law was written, so we have given consideration to that. We have asked General Counsel about it and that's the interpretation of the law as it is on the books.

Mr. SHELBY. What areas in the country, other than what you have already said, would you pinpoint as having maximum impact on the national cemetery service to veterans on the basis of present and future demographic conditions?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, all we have, again, is the population, and we have taken the State or the metropolitan area. I was in northern California this weekend. Northern California, I imagine, has the greatest number of veterans of any metropolitan area and needs a cemetery very badly.

Congressman Chandler referred to Seattle, and I believe you have visited there. There are two reasons for the need. One is that the regional cemetery (Willamette) is located in Portland, OR is slowly filling up and we will lose that cemetery. Also, we have a great number of veterans concentrated in the Northwest area. Chicago is another area. I was there Sunday night. I met with the American Legion and they are very desirous of having a cemetery in Chicago. Dallas-Fort Worth is another area that I might mention.

So there are areas in the United States that did not qualify for the regional concept, nor have they a State grant program in mind, and would be ideal for a national cemetery if we are truly trying to serve the veterans in the community.

Mr. SHELBY. Would you elaborate a little more on the situation in northern California? I had the opportunity to go out and look at a potential site there. I know it is a slow process and I know there is a lot of clamor and push for a VA cemetery in northern California.

Mr. BANNAI. I went there this weekend as we had heard we may get land in Alameda County, where Camp Parks is located. I have seen nothing in writing officially. There was a proposal to us that they were willing to exchange land which they have because they would like to have the Camp Parks land—I believe it's local community pressure. I looked at several other parcels that they would like to exchange with us at Camp Parks.

Mr. SHELBY. Have you had any communication with Mr. Stockman at OMB regarding the cemetery in northern California?

Mr. BANNAI. It has all been one-sided. Every time we have it in the budget, it's taken out. So I'm sure someone over there must

not, for whatever reasons, allocate to us the resources. Their response to our question is that it is the policy of not——

Mr. SHELBY. Aren't all the veterans' service organizations in California pushing for that cemetery in northern California?

Mr. BANNAI [continuing]. Yes, and the legislators, both Senators and Congressmen in those areas.

Mr. SHELBY. The gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Bannai, welcome to the subcommittee. I read over your prepared statement earlier this morning and I appreciate the comprehensive character of it. It does provide this committee with a lot of insight and some very good data relevant to the state of our national cemeteries.

I have a couple of questions, Mr. Bannai. First of all, Mr. McCain, our colleague from Arizona, spoke earlier today as to the issue of prioritizing new cemetery acquisitions according to demonstrated need. Has the VA compiled any data relevant to unmet need? That is to say, can you provide this subcommittee with any numbers, real or guestimates, as to how many veterans and survivors wish to be buried in national cemeteries but can't?

Mr. BANNAI. You mean countrywide?

Mr. SMITH. Countrywide.

Mr. BANNAI. I don't think that we have that. The only time that we really hear is when a next-of-kin of a veteran would write to a Congressman and say, you know, I asked for interment in a national cemetery and I find out that there is no national cemetery in my particular area. People don't think about making provisions for when they're going to die. I guess we all feel we're going to be here forever. As a result, nothing happens until that veteran dies and the family member says, "I heard about the National Cemetery System and I would like to have my husband buried in a national cemetery." Then the question arises; and sometimes, there is no national cemetery.

I knew, because it happened through one of my family members, about the case of one of the few young men that was killed in Grenada. It came close to me because his family told my daughter in Seattle they would like to have him buried in a national cemetery although they had not planned on it. The closest one was Willamette, OR, which was 130–140 miles away. They opted to take a private plot. But it only arises at that time. If we were to go around and ask the veterans "Would your preference be a national cemetery or a private cemetery," I am sure that we could get some kind of a count, a rough idea. But I don't think it has ever been done.

Mr. SMITH. In terms of the complaints after the death has occurred?

Mr. BANNAI. Yes, they occur afterwards. In fact, this happens in many areas where we have national cemeteries that are closed. They say, there's a national cemetery and why can't he be buried there? Well, it's full. I don't know if you know our statistics here, but many of the cemeteries are closed.

I might make a comment here that in New Jersey, when you open the State veterans cemetery, it should be a very active facility like the Arizona State cemetery which is the busiest State grant cemetery in all of the States. We do not keep figures but we ask

the States just to keep track. The Arizona State Veterans Cemetery busier than any of the five cemeteries in Maryland.

I predict that the new State veterans cemetery in New Jersey, because of the closeness to a population center, and the number of people that are unserved in New Jersey, will probably be equal to if not in excess of the one in Arizona.

Incidentally, I might point out for the committee that all State veterans cemeteries use flat markers. There is not one upright marker. The State veterans cemeteries have the opportunity to choose whatever kind of markers they want.

Mr. SMITH [continuing]. One final question, Mr. Bannai.

In your opinion, does OMB object to the expansion of the National Cemetery System even though the regional system was authorized as an interim measure?

Mr. BANNAI. I don't know. I wasn't here. We researched throughout our agency and throughout our records. We have never said that with the placement of the cemeteries in a regional concept that that would fulfill our needs. But OMB has said it is the policy.

Now, whether it is our policy or their policy, I really don't know. I have a feeling that it's a policy that they have set.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SHELBY. Thank you.

Mr. Sundquist.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you, Mr. Bannai.

It seems to me—and maybe I misunderstood what you said earlier—that the regional concept—I think this is what you said, and correct me if this is wrong—the regional concept is working where the regional cemetery is put in an area where there is a large population.

Mr. BANNAI. Correct.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Could you give me an example of one that's working well and one that is not working well, if you would?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, I pointed out Calverton, NY, which did approximately 6,000 interments last year. We have the same resources in there as at other regional cemeteries.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. What is that near for purposes of the record?

Mr. BANNAI. Long Island. It's near New York City.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. And that's a regional cemetery?

Mr. BANNAI. Yes.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. What region does it cover?

Mr. BANNAI. Region No. 2.

Let's take, for example, region No. 1, which is——

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Excuse me. Let me go back.

What States are in that region that would be handled by that cemetery?

Mr. BANNAI [continuing]. Of New York?

Mr. SUNDQUIST. New York.

Mr. BANNAI. I don't have a particular map, but it would include New Jersey and New York. The population there is quite large.

The region 1 cemetery is in Massachusetts. It would take in Vermont, Maine, all of the New England States.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you.

Then you were going to go ahead and describe the one that wasn't working well?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, as I say, Massachusetts, which with the same resources is doing possibly a little over one-tenth the interments of Calverton, NY.

We will compare Riverside, CA, which is fairly close to a metropolitan area, and Indiantown Gap, which only does one-tenth of the interments of Riverside. As I say, we put the same amount of money in to build each one of those cemeteries. The feeling is that if you're going to put money into a cemetery, it should do the maximum amount of service for the veterans.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. The one in Massachusetts is not working because it—Where is it located, for instance?

Mr. BANNAI. It's on Cape Cod, in Bourne, MA. It was formerly part of the Otis Air Force Base.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. So it's not doing well because it's too far from Boston?

Mr. BANNAI. Yes. It's about 65 to 75 miles from Boston.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. It seems that what you have just outlined, Mr. Bannai, is the reason the regional cemetery concept doesn't work.

Mr. BANNAI. It does work, as I say——

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Well, let me go ahead and finish, if I may. Let me quote out of what Mr. Magill is going to testify to in just a few minutes. He says, "However, we strongly question to what extent these cemeteries will be utilized by veterans who do not reside in relatively close proximity to them."

If the people in Boston who live 60 miles away don't go to Hyannis, then how on Earth do you expect somebody from New Hampshire to go to Long Island? In other areas, you not only have the State question but in Massachusetts you have a within-a-State question. It seems to me that your testimony directly conflicts with what we're trying to accomplish—I'm talking officially of the policy of the regional cemeteries.

Are we just interested in the population areas and we're not worried about the veterans who may be a little ways away or in a different State?

Mr. BANNAI [continuing]. We are. But let me followup on that. I was not here when the legislation was passed, but it was determined that we would set up the regional concept. If there are areas that are unserved, or States that are unserved, the State grant program was put into place to fulfill those needs for each State that did not have a regional cemetery.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you.

Mr. SHELBY. Thank you, Mr. Bannai. On behalf of the committee, again we appreciate your attendance and your candid remarks.

I would like to followup on one thing again, if I could. What are the prospects at this time, if you could comment on it, on the cemetery proposal in the Seattle area? I know you visited the area yourself, did you not?

Mr. BANNAI. Yes, I did. I am very hopeful that we will get a cemetery there. But again, if we meet the same obstacles that we're meeting in the northern California area, I really don't know how to go about it, other than perhaps——

Mr. SHELBY. You're speaking of obstacles in Washington, right?

Mr. BANNAI [continuing]. That's where they are. They're not anywhere else.

Congressman Chandler did not tell you this, but this afternoon there is a delegation coming in from that area in Seattle that I will be meeting with. They are to present some alternatives or asking for some assistance. We can only give them one thing.

I might mention one thing about Seattle. Congressman Chandler mentioned the fact, and maybe you saw the cemetery——

Mr. SHELBY. I saw it, yes.

Mr. BANNAI [continuing]. You notice they were all flat markers and it was a very beautiful cemetery. One of the conditions that I made with the people in Seattle was that I must place flat markers there. If the bill passes, I will have to reconsider talking to them because they like the park-like atmosphere of the cemetery to the north, which has land patterns. They do not want buildings on the property, on the 200 acres, nor do they want upright markers.

So we have several places I have dealt with, such as the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, where they also are willing to donate land for a cemetery there, but they do not want upright markers. One of the conditions, I understood, when we took the cemetery at Riverside, CA was that we also have flat markers there. I think there may have to be some exceptions made in several areas, and I think——

Mr. SHELBY. Is that because they're in a flight pattern for aircraft?

Mr. BANNAI [continuing]. Yes.

Mr. SHELBY. They don't want any obstacles.

Mr. BANNAI. Right, not in that particular area.

I mentioned reopening Bay Pines. No one is here from Florida, but when we reopened that cemetery after 20 years, we went to flat markers, although previously they were all uprights. We will have to close that cemetery one-third quicker than we had anticipated if legislation mandating upright headstones is passed. That is the same with many of the cemeteries that we operate.

I just want to point this out, because we are now reassessing the legislation as you have given it to us.

Mr. SHELBY. Thank you.

The gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Going back to the States to get some matching grants, how is that working?

Mr. BANNAI. It is not working as well as I would like to see it work. There are several things that are told to me, and you heard from the people who testified. One is the ongoing cost, the maintenance cost. The other is the 50-50 grant. They don't feel that it's adequate to take care of their needs.

I attended several of the veterans' national conventions, and one of the proposals that was brought up but never materialized into a resolution—at least I have not seen it—is that they would like to see the grant made similar to those which we give to nursing homes, which is on a 65-35 basis, 35 from the States. I thought that that might encourage some of the States to get into the State grant program.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. A few minutes ago, when we were talking about the problem within some region, if it's not in a population area, did you state that, where there is a problem, the States can do this?

Mr. BANNAI. Yes.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. And you gave New Jersey as one example.

What about in those areas where the State can't afford to do it or won't do it? What happens in those situations?

Mr. BANNAI. Well, we have a lot of those States. I met with the Veterans' Affairs Committee in the State of Utah. They do not have a veterans cemetery. We looked at a site in a place called Bluffdale, where the land is part of the National Guard property and would be of no cost to them. They have gone to the legislature on two occasions for the 50-percent-grant money, but have been turned down for several reasons. I think that in those areas, if the veterans do want a veterans cemetery, then it is incumbent upon the local veterans to talk to their State legislature because in a State such as Utah or Idaho I do not think that a national cemetery would come into being because of priorities in other areas.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. I submit to you that it wasn't the State legislatures or the States that drafted people in time of war when many of them gave their lives. To say that the veterans who have a need have to go to the States for that assistance, when you have said, No. 1, the regional concept works in areas where there's a population growth, that means it's going to take care of those people in that vicinity. It does not work well where that is not the case. That only indicates to me that it's a close area that uses these cemeteries.

Then you say the States can pick up the rest of it. That, to me, does not sound like a national policy for the Veterans' Administration. I don't think it's working, and I think the veterans have a gripe. I think in your testimony today, at least my interpretation of it, is that you agree it is not working, either. You're saying, where they don't have a national veterans' cemetery near them, that they have to go to the State to try to get some assistance. I submit to you that that is not fair.

Mr. BANNAI. I agree with you 100 percent. There are many things that are unfair that I would like to change, but under the guidance that we're given, we have to set priorities. What I'm saying is, if we're going to serve the veterans, and we have 28 million, I would rather serve as many as I possibly can with the resoures that we have. That's always been my intent. We try to reopen cemeteries. You have five cemeteries in your State and we try to keep them open, to serve as many of the veterans in your State as any other State that we possibly can.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Very shortly in my State they're going to be at capacity and they will be closed.

Mr. BANNAI. One of the reasons is you have mandated the upright markers. You will close your cemeteries quicker than we had hoped to keep those cemeteries open. As I said before, the local elected officials will hear of closed cemeteries. We're trying to keep cemeteries open as long as possible with the resources we have.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. I don't want to reopen that argument, Mr. Chairman, but I think in testimony before this committee the reduction in size of the burial plot was not related and was not a necessity

because of the upright marker. I think that's an inaccurate statement, Mr. Bannai.

Mr. BANNAI. Well, it is a matter of fact——

Mr. SUNDQUIST. It may be the plot size may be different, but the plot size was not dictated by the size of the headstone. I would like to make sure the record is correct, or if I'm wrong——.

Mr. SHELBY. If the gentleman will yield, I don't recall anything there. If there is such testimony in the record, I would like for the staff or your staff to share it with the members of the committee. I didn't see any correlation there as you did.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SHELBY. Thank you, Mr. Bannai, for appearing before us.

Mr. BANNAI. My pleasure.

Mr. SHELBY. Our next panel will be Mr. Richard Johnson, Jr., national legislative director, Non Commissioned Officers Association; Mr. James Magill, assistant director, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; and Mr. David Gorman, legislative director, Disabled American Veterans.

Gentlemen, if you all will come up. Collectively, your written testimony, as you know, will be submitted in its totality for the record. If you would briefly sum up your remarks. We're in session now, I understand, and hopefully we won't have to break the committee meeting up for a vote.

Mr. Johnson, please proceed.

STATEMENTS OF RICHARD W. JOHNSON, JR., NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA; JAMES N. MAGILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES; AND DAVID W. GORMAN, ASSISTANT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

STATEMENT OF RICHARD W. JOHNSON, JR.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have just a brief statement this morning.

First, NCOA appreciates the opportunity to appear here to discuss the National Cemetery System. We commend the committee and the Veterans' Administration and all those who have contributed to the growth and success of the National Cemetery System since it was created in 1973. The efforts of all those involved have made the program truly remarkable.

Notwithstanding all the effort that has gone into creating the Regional Cemetery Program, NCOA is concerned about the ability of the program to meet the future needs of veterans. Without repeating all the statistical information that has been presented here earlier this morning, I think it is safe to say there is an acknowledged inadequacy in both the numbers and preferred geographic distribution of burial sites in the current cemetery system inventory. It is also our understanding that the VA will soon publish a report recommending a reasonable expansion of the regional cemetery concept. Fundamentally, we believe it will suggest a few slightly smaller cemeteries in more locations throughout the United States and a continuation of efforts to reopen previously

closed cemeteries. NCOA endorses such an expansion to fulfill the need for more gravesites in areas with large veteran populations and to allow for the burial of veterans closer to home. We urge your committee continue its study of this issue.

The association's second concern is the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials may be underutilized. In 1984, the committee met only once, and in the past 2 fiscal years it has met only three times.

Mr. Chairman, NCOA makes more specific recommendations regarding the advisory committee in its prepared text. Most important, though, it is our belief that Congress should direct the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs to convene meetings of the committee at least twice during each fiscal year.

In recent months there has been an increase in which the improperly or inadequately prepared remains of veterans have been delivered to the national cemeteries for burial. The remains of some veterans have been delivered in body bags and nothing more. Therefore, NCOA's third suggestion this morning is that the VA be directed to prescribe and promulgate regulations setting minimum acceptable standards for funeral preparations and caskets used in all burials in national cemeteries.

Also regarding interments, NCOA recommends using graveliners for interments in national cemeteries. It is the association's belief that such a practice will result in substantial savings in maintenance costs, particularly where upright markers are used.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, NCOA has addressed the grave marker issue and burial eligibility requirements in our prepared statement. Hopefully, the committee will consider the recommendations we have made on these issues and that you will find them useful.

Thank you. That concludes my statement.

[The statement of Richard W. Johnson appears at p. 46.]

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. Magill.

STATEMENT OF JAMES N. MAGILL

Mr. MAGILL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the privilege of presenting to this subcommittee the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars with respect to the National Cemetery System.

The very rapidly aging veteran population is not only providing a challenge to the VA's health care system, but will also have a severe impact on the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs. In view of the vast numbers involved, the crucial planning and timely implementation to expand or better utilize existing resources and programs must be aggressively pursued.

As in the past, the VFW has been mandated by resolution to seek an open national cemetery in every State. We are still very strongly committed to that end.

With respect to the regionalization concept, we are pleased that this project is nearing completion. However, as was previously remarked upon, we strongly question to what extent these cemeteries will be utilized by veterans who do not reside in close proximity to them.

Mr. Chairman, while our primary concern is for an open national cemetery in every State, we support and encourage the utiliza-

tion of the State Cemetery Grant Program. We believe this program complements the National Cemetery System in providing a cost-effective partial solution to the increasing demand on the VA to provide burial space.

This concludes my statement and I will be happy to respond to questions.

[The statement of James N. Magill appears at p. 56.]

Mr. SHELBY. Thank you.

Mr. Gorman.

STATEMENT OF DAVID W. GORMAN

Mr. GORMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to extend our appreciation to you and the members of the subcommittee for the invitation to appear here this morning, and also we commend you and the members of the subcommittee for this timely exercise of your legislative oversight function.

Today the National Cemetery System consists of 109 cemeteries located in 38 States and Puerto Rico. Of that total net number of national cemeteries, 51 are closed for additional interments, leaving 58 national cemeteries open for interments, with approximately 320,000 gravesites available.

Mr. Chairman, it is projected that by 1990 only 46 national cemeteries will be open, and by the year 2000 only 41 national cemeteries are expected to be open for the interment of veterans. It is interesting to note that 7 States contain only closed cemeteries, leaving 31 States and Puerto Rico with the 58 open cemeteries. However, if you look at the distribution of those open cemeteries, it appears rather uneven. Simply stated, there are 19 States with either no national cemetery, or the national cemetery within that State is closed.

It is our impression, Mr. Chairman, that the expansion of the National Cemetery System is based on the VA's philosophy that one national cemetery should be constructed and available for interments in each of the 10 designated Federal regions and the Washington, DC area.

Our organization, in accordance with a resolution adopted by the delegates to our most recent national convention, as well as past conventions, believes that expansion of the system should be based on a policy which contains the ultimate goal of providing at least one open national cemetery in each State.

Mr. Chairman, an issue that has been and will continue to be the topic of much conversation is the impact that the aging veteran will place on the Veterans' Administration. We believe, with the rapidly aging veteran population, and with the growth and shift of our Nation's veterans population centers, a national cemetery in every State is a realistic necessity.

In terms of people served and the budget allocated, we feel that the Department of Memorial Affairs, under the direction of Mr. Bannai, has grown appreciably over the years. We are hopeful, Mr. Chairman, that a continuation of that growth will continue into the future.

At this point I would like to take the opportunity to express the DAV's appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, and all the members of

the Veterans' Affairs Committee, for the passage of legislation earlier this year, Public Law 98-223, which provided for an extension through fiscal year 1989 of the State Matching Grant Program for establishing, expanding, or improving State veterans' cemeteries.

As you know, and as has been discussed this morning, the State cemetery grant program complements the VA's National Cemetery System by providing a 50-50 matching grant to States who wish to build their own cemeteries. The State Cemetery Grant Program became operational on October 1, 1979, and as of September 30, 1983, the VA received 20 requests from 11 States requesting $9.8 million. Of the funds requested, approximately $8.1 million was obligated in support of construction projects.

Mr. Chairman, we suggest to the subcommittee that greater utilization of the matching grants to State programs for construction, expansion or improvement of State veteran cemeteries may very well be one viable avenue by which the Federal Government can offset the cost of new national cemetery construction and, at the same time, meet veterans' burial needs.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. Again, thank you for allowing us to appear this morning.

[The statement of David W. Gorman appears at p. 63.]

Mr. SHELBY. All of you gentlemen, I want to thank you for your statements this morning. I want to assure you that I am committed, as the chairman of the subcommittee—and I assume my colleagues here are also committed—to the expansion of the National Cemetery System. We will consider each and every proposal that is presented to the subcommittee.

We also recognize that there has been a real demographic shift around the country. There are areas where we probably need to expand some existing cemeteries, and there are some areas that have been mentioned today where there is an obvious need to expand. I have worked with a lot of the service organizations, as other members of the subcommittee have, and if we don't get moving on this, you know, there's going to be a crisis down the road. I think that's one reason you all are here today.

The gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to compliment the gentlemen on their fine statements.

I have a couple of questions. First of all, we heard, and I know you were in attendance earlier today, when Mr. McCain and the other members testified. Have you looked at or studied H.R. 5988, the McCain bill?

Mr. MAGILL. Yes, sir; we have. We have not gone into it indepth. But I am aware of the bill.

Mr. SMITH. Do you have any initial readings?

Mr. GORMAN. I can't add to that.

Mr. JOHNSON. It's a step in the right direction, Mr. Smith. It's a start toward expanding the program. I think it would probably behoove all of us to wait and see what the VA has to say about the issue in its upcoming study.

Mr. SMITH. I have a couple of other questions.

Do you find among your members and surviving families of your members any disinclination to use a State veteran cemetery? That is to say, is there any sentiment among your members that the na-

tional cemetery is somehow a notch above and the State cemetery is not in the same league?

Mr. GORMAN. I think, speaking from the DAV's perspective, sir, that the feeling is, given a choice, the national cemetery would be the preferred burial site, definitely.

Mr. MAGILL. We would agree with that, also. We still would like to make the point, as was brought out again earlier, that it is the Federal Government's responsibility in our opinion to provide a cemetery. The States are there, I think, to complement, but it was the Federal Government who requested the men and women to join and it is the Federal Government's responsibility to continue that responsibility.

Mr. SMITH. I think that point was also made by my colleague, Mr. Sundquist, earlier today.

How knowledgeable would you say your membership is about their eligibility to be interred in a national cemetery? I noticed earlier that Mr. Bannai said that in Massachusetts the regional cemetery was not being utilized very much and Long Island was being well utilized. I was wondering if it may be a function of the local veterans' organization, that perhaps they and the VA are doing a better job in New York of informing veterans.

Mr. GORMAN. I think the eligibility is probably known to those people who had the foresight to check into it. I would agree with some of Mr. Bannai's statement, that people don't usually look that far down the road to plan for their interment needs.

But again, I think the demographics have a lot to do with it. Even with the eligibility known to a veteran living in, say, New Hampshire, in order to travel 150 or 200 miles, whatever the distance may be to Bourne, MA, sort of dismisses that potential right there.

Mr. JOHNSON. I agree with that in part. There is an absence of knowledge among the veterans that is quite deceiving. I think the average veteran out there assumes he has some burial eligibility and, regrettably, that assumption goes so far as to believe that in many cases the Federal Government provides entirely for the burial.

That leads, in part, to one of the issues I brought out in my statement; that is, you have veterans being delivered to national cemeteries in body bags for interment, with a family that subsequently shows up expecting a silver casket that is draped in flags and with a band standing by, pallbearers and everything. There is a concept out there among veterans that these things are automatically provided. Regrettably, they are not. Therefore, the veteran is not likely to go searching because of his misperception of the situation for a burial plot. It is just not a well understood subject.

Mr. SMITH. One final question. I think Mr. Bannai made a good point when he said it clearly would be his intent, as well as this committee's intent, if we could have national cemeteries available and in close proximity to the veteran population so that they could utilize them. But unfortunately, with scarce resources, it is pretty hard to do that. Hopefully we'll move closer and closer toward that goal.

But the State-Federal match seems to be an alternative with, I think, a great deal of appeal. The other veterans organizations—

and I noticed that you, Mr. Magill, in your written testimony, indicate that you do support it. I know that in my own State, when we were pushing for utilization of some ground in North Hanover, which used to be in my district, the veterans' organizations were key in helping to make our Governor aware and to keep the pressure on to bring the State money to fruition so that we could have the matching grant.

I was wondering, how active are your organizations in lobbying for utilization of that State-Federal match?

Mr. JOHNSON. Where we have the opportunity to do so, we encourage our chapters to get involved in those things. Regrettably, we don't have a large national program that is capable of lobbying 50 State legislatures and so forth. But we do encourage our chapters to try and provide as they can within the boundaries of the States.

Mr. GORMAN. From my office and our perspective, we target our efforts on a national basis. However, very often, when an issue comes up on a State basis, we do have the ability to alert our State leaders of the issue. A lot of States really can mobilize very quickly and very effectively to get to their local representatives on an issue that is important primarily to that State.

I agree, that I think the matching grant program has tremendous potential. It is one avenue to lift some of the burden, although I agree the burden falls on the Federal Government, but lifts some of that burden, and at the same time it gives the State that feeling that they are in some way contributing to the veterans' needs within their State. I think that is important.

Mr. SMITH. It would seem to me it would be a further way of involving the Federal Government toward that goal of one cemetery per State, because if a State makes a request and goes through the procedure of applying for a grant, it seems to me that in many cases, if they can demonstrate need, they will prevail.

Thank you very much, gentlemen. I appreciate your comments.

Mr. SHELBY. The gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Sundquist.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

When we have these State veterans cemeteries, is there anything in the name that implies it's not a national cemetery? Does that discourage people or make them feel as if they're less than a national veteran?

Mr. JOHNSON. Absent a national cemetery clearly designated in an area, I think the State veterans cemetery is an accepted alternative for the people that are living in that region. I have never heard any reference to a State cemetery or a State veterans cemetery being a second class place of burial for a veteran. There are many cemeteries, private cemeteries even, that designate veterans areas. In those cases, you find high veteran acceptance.

Naturally there is a preference to a national cemetery, but absent a national cemetery, I think a State veterans cemetery is well accepted by the veteran.

Mr. MAGILL. One thing I would like to add, too, I think it is very important that the veteran be buried in close proximity to his relatives and friends. Again, I will agree with Mr. Johnson, that if it was a national cemetery, of course, they would go to that. But I have heard nothing that would indicate a veteran would be

thought of as second class because he's in a State veterans cemetery.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. What are they named in the various States, for instance? How are they referred to?

Mr. MAGILL. As far as I know, a veterans cemetery.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Are they still called national cemeteries?

Mr. MAGILL. Are you talking about the States, sir, or the——

Mr. SUNDQUIST. The States, right.

Mr. MAGILL [continuing]. Well, they are all called veterans cemeteries, which is what they consider themselves.

Mr. JOHNSON. In some States they are. I was down in Nashville recently and they have a State veterans cemetery in Nashville that's referred to as a national cemetery.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. So there shouldn't be any reason for them to think that it's anything less than the national cemetery, in appearance or in care or anything else?

Mr. JOHNSON. It's a rather esoteric issue. I don't see that there's a big emphasis placed on it by veterans.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. A question, Mr. Johnson, on your testimony about some of the veterans being brought to the VA cemeteries in no more than body bags. How often does this occur and what are the circumstances surrounding that testimony?

Mr. JOHNSON. As I was saying a few moments ago, quite frequently it is a lack of understanding. Just a couple of years ago we had a situation where a veteran was interred down here at Quantico, regrettably in a less-than-adequate casket, that fell apart in the rain on the day of the funeral. We have taken care of that. We have addressed that issue in regulations and we have prescribed a minimum pressboard casket for veterans buried at VA expense.

Regrettably, there is a misunderstanding among many family members as to what is provided by the veterans cemetery. Many families believe that their only obligation is to turn the body over to the veterans cemetery and that a casket will be provided and that a flag will be provided, that pallbearers and the honor guard and so forth just are all part of the cemetery service.

In a number of cases you also have indigent veterans coming to the cemetery where there is some family that has not sought the proper allowances to have the body properly prepared or placed in a casket. As a result, you end up with funeral homes just literally bringing in veterans in body bags at the family's request because the family doesn't know any better and frequently because the funeral home doesn't know any better.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. It seems to me that that would not be the fault of the VA.

Mr. JOHNSON. No, it is not. But if the VA prescribes regulations that are well circulated among funeral homes, that say if you're going to send us a veteran for burial, that he must be in the minimum standard casket which we prescribe for indigent veterans, then we have at least headed off the problem before it makes it all the way to the burialsite.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. What you're saying is there ought to be some regulations by the VA, that when there is a burial of a veteran, before they would allow that burial to occur that these minimum regulations have to be fulfilled?

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes. I'm not sure whether that would require a statutory change or whether it could be done by regulation, but what I am suggesting is yes, that we prescribe a minimum acceptable casket, minimum acceptable body preparation, before the remains of the veteran are delivered to the cemetery for burial.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Mr. Chairman, if we could, I suggest that our staff could talk to the VA and find out what the situation is in that regard, and then perhaps we could get back to Mr. Johnson on that issue.

Mr. SHELBY. Mrs. Royce will see that that's done and then get back with us.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Because I think it is certainly not the intent of the VA to do that.

Mr. SHELBY. It's an excellent idea that the gentleman has.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. I have the highest regard for the VA and I think what they are trying to do is right.

Mr. SHELBY. If the gentleman would yield, they're like all of us, though. Sometimes they need to be guided by the service organizations and I hope by the members of the committee.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. Chairman, may I add to that?

Mr. SHELBY. I recognize the gentleman. Go ahead, Mr. Johnson.

Mr. JOHNSON. I hope I haven't given an improper impression. I don't think this is a Veterans' Administration problem or one that they could have preempted in the past. I think it is something that has recently come up. It has been brought to our attention in southern California, and I think it is something that needs to be dealt with. But I certainly don't believe that the VA is responsible for it.

Mr. SUNDQUIST. Mr. Johnson, I didn't interpret it that way. What I was about to say was that I think the value of testimony like this today, in hearings like this, is to find out what the problems are so that we can communicate with the VA. They have generally been very willing to correct problems, but we often don't know they exist until organizations like yours hear about them, because you are in direct contact with the veterans.

We thank you for your testimony and for bringing these matters before us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SHELBY. I want to just reiterate what the gentleman from Tennessee has said. The purpose of an oversight hearing, which is what we're having here, is to discover problems and try to resolve them. That's why we want to work with the service organizations and the VA. We're all interested in seeing that the veterans' programs work for the veterans. That's what they're set up for and I know that is your interest.

I do want to thank all of you for appearing before the subcommittee, and I want to convey my sincere appreciation for your well-thought-out statements. The hearing today will set the basis for legislation that I plan to introduce early in the next session dealing with this and other problems, and I hope some of my colleagues, will see fit to help us with it.

It may be well at the time for the committee to establish a plan similar to that of the medical construction budget, which will let the VA identify those areas of the country which are most in need

and deserving of a national cemetery and allot our current and future resources on that basis. It is something for us to consider.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

[The following was received for the record at p. 28.]

NATIONAL CAPITAL OFFICE
NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
STRENGTH IN UNITY

219 North Washington Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Telephone (703) 549-0311

October 30, 1984

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Housing and
Memorial Affairs
Committee on Veterans Affairs
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for inviting the Non Commissioned Officers Association the opportunity to supply for the record specific examples of situations which support our request for regulations or legislation setting minimum standards for presentation of a veteran's remains for burial in a National Cemetery.

In Santa Fe, New Mexico--a funeral home offering "minimum fee funerals" presented the body of a veteran to the national cemetery there unembalmed, wrapped in sheets, in a box that would not be acceptable under minimum perscribed standards for the burial of indigent veterans. Cemetery workers became physically ill handling the remains. After a similar incident, the regional director of the cemetery system refused to accept remains from that mortuary again even though his decision is without basis in law or regulation. The services provided by the funeral home are legal under New Mexico law and federal regulation.

In Corinth, Mississippi--the remains of a veteran who died in the VA medical center were claimed by the next of kin. The veteran was subsequently presented at the national cemetery for burial in a body bag. The cemetery and regional directors successfully imposed on the next of kin their belief that a more appropriate vessel should be used for burial of the veteran.

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania--veterans whose burial is paid for by the city, and whose remains are prepared by other than VA contract funeral homes, are frequently refused by the cemetery. This is a problem which NCOA has been told is widespread in the northeastern U.S. (This problem is being resolved through negotiation, however, it indicates the ignorance of funeral home directors on minimum acceptable standards which should be observed.)

In Chattanooga, Tennessee--a funeral home director, indicating that he was exploring options in response to recent Federal Trade Commission regulations requiring funeral directors to price individual services, recently inquired to the VA as to whether caskets were required or if body bags were acceptable for the internment of veterans in national cemeteries.

Mr. Chairman, these are but a few examples of a problem with a potential to become more widespread. Until now many adverse situations have been averted by cemetery directors. However, as we have pointed out, their actions are without foundation in law or regulation. It is our sincere belief that they should have some protection in making these delicate decisions.

Thank you for the attention you and the staff of the committee has given to this issue.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Johnson, Jr.
Director of Legislative Affairs

39-585 O—84——5

Mr. SHELBY. The subcommittee is adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 10:35 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

STATEMENT OF
CONGRESSMAN JOHN McCAIN
FIRST DISTRICT, ARIZONA
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
OCTOBER 2, 1984

MR. CHAIRMAN, I AM EXTREMELY PLEASED TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU AND THE DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THIS SUBCOMMITTEE TODAY TO DISCUSS THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. I ESPECIALLY APPRECIATE HAVING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY ON THE LEGISLATION I RECENTLY INTRODUCED THAT WOULD PROVIDE FOR EXPANSION IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM.

AS YOU KNOW, MR. CHAIRMAN, THE NATIONAL CEMETERIES ACT OF 1973 CREATED OUR PRESENT DAY NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. IT PROVIDED FOR A CONSOLIDATION OF 82 DEPARTMENT OF ARMY NATIONAL CEMETERIES, 32 BURIAL PLOTS AND MONUMENT SITES, AND 21 VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL CEMETERIES AND PLACED THEM UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE VA. AS A RESULT OF A STUDY REQUIRED UNDER THIS ACT, THE REGIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM WAS ADOPTED. THIS CONCEPT CALLED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ONE LARGE NATIONAL CEMETERY IN EACH OF THE TEN STANDARD FEDERAL REGIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS CONCEPT HAS NOT PROVIDED ADEQUATE SERVICE TO ALL VETERANS NATIONWIDE.

CURRENTLY, THERE ARE 109 NATIONAL CEMETERIES, INCLUDING THE 10 REGIONAL LOCATIONS. OF THESE, ONLY 57 ARE IN THE OPEN STATUS FOR THE INTERMENT OF THE VETERAN AND FIRST FAMILY MEMBERS. MOST OF THESE CEMETERIES ARE LOCATED IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN PORTIONS OF THE COUNTRY. ESTIMATES INDICATE THAT 66% OF ALL LIVING VETERANS REMAIN UNREASONABLY SERVED BY AN OPEN NATIONAL CEMETERY. AN AGING VETERAN POPULATION IS SURE TO PLACE A HEAVY DEMAND ON THE SUN BELT STATES AS WELL AS THOSE AREAS WHICH HAVE HISTORICALLY PROVIDED HEALTH RELATED RELIEF FOR THE AGING. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS UNFORTUNATE INEQUITY IS THAT OF A VETERAN LOCATED IN THE SAN FRANCISCO AREA IS SERVED BY THE RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA REGIONAL CEMETERY, SOME 435 MILES AWAY. IN FACT, A SOON TO BE RELEASED STUDY ON THE VA'S NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM WILL, I AM SURE, CONFIRM THIS INJUSTICE.

THE BILL I HAVE INTRODUCED, HR 5988, ATTEMPTS TO REDIRECT OUR ATTENTION TOWARD THOSE AREAS WITH THE GREATEST NEED. THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE VA WOULD BE REQUIRED TO PLACE IN PRIORTY THOSE AREAS AND PLAN FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CEMETERIES IN AT LEAST THE TEN AREAS PROJECTED TO HAVE THE GREATEST NEED. AS YOU KNOW, WE ARE PRESENTLY USING THIS METHOD TO EXPAND OUR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE FACILITIES.

IN LIGHT OF PRESENT BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS, I FEEL IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THOSE STATES WITH A NATIONAL CEMETERY HAVE TRADITIONALLY DONATED LAND TO THE VA FOR THAT PURPOSE. ADDITIONALLY, THE VA SHOULD CONSIDER THE DESIRABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ACQUIRING EXISTING STATE CEMETERIES FOR INCLUSION INTO THE NATIONAL SYSTEM. THIS WOULD PRECLUDE THE NECESSITY OF THE VA TO MAKE FAIR MARKET VALUE PURCHASES OF LAND, WHETHER IT BE INTERAGENCY TRANSFERS OR STATE OWNED LAND. BY MAKING THESE PROVISIONS, I FEEL CONFIDENT THAT CAPITAL EXPENDITURES COULD BE KEPT AT A MINIMUM.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THERE IS A CERTAIN COMFORT TO THE VETERAN IN KNOWING THAT HE WILL HAVE THE HONOR OF BEING LAID TO REST IN A NATIONAL CEMETERY, A RESTING PLACE CLOSE TO HIS FAMILY MEMBERS. I THINK WE ALL AGREE THAT THE PRESENT DAY SYSTEM DOES NOT PROVIDE THIS ASSURANCE FOR MOST OF OUR NATION'S VETERANS. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY, AS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, TO ENSURE THE COMMITMENT AND OBLIGATION INCUMBENT UPON THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION.

TESTIMONY OF
THE HONORABLE ROD CHANDLER
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

OCTOBER 2, 1984

MR. CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE, I THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR BEFORE THIS SUBCOMMITTEE TO VOICE MY CONCERNS REGARDING THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL CEMETERY IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON.

LET ME CITE SOME RELEVANT FACTS ABOUT OUR STATE.

-- FIRST, WASHINGTON STATE HAS THE THIRD LARGEST VETERAN POPULATION PER 1,000 CIVILIAN POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES, ABOUT 150 PER 1,000.

-- SECOND, THE STATE'S TOTAL VETERAN POPULATION IS ALMOST 630,000 OR 15% OF THE TOTAL STATE POPULATION, AND WHEN WIDOWS AND OTHER DEPENDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFITS ARE INCLUDED, WASHINGTON'S TOTAL VETERAN BENEFIT POPULATION IS 1,500,000.

-- AND, AS YOU KNOW, MR. CHAIRMAN, THE PROJECTED ESTIMATED NUMBER OF WASHINGTON VETERAN DEATHS IN THE YEAR 2000 IS APPROXIMATELY 13,000.

YET IN SPITE OF THESE IMPRESSIVE FIGURES, WASHINGTON HAS NO NATIONAL CEMETERY TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEEDS OF ITS VETERAN POPULATION. EVEN THOUGH 88% OF THE STATE'S VETERAN POPULATION IS WITHIN A 100-MILE RADIUS OF THE SEATTLE METROPOLITAN AREA, THE CLOSEST NATIONAL CEMETERY TO WASHINGTON'S VETERANS IS THE WILLAMETTE REGIONAL CEMETERY IN PORTLAND, OREGON, A JOURNEY OF SEVERAL HUNDRED MILES FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES. CLEARLY, MR. CHAIRMAN, WASHINGTON'S AGING VETERAN POPULATION IS FACING THE ONCOMING DIRE NEED OF A NATIONAL CEMETERY.

FOR SOME TIME, THERE HAS BEEN STRONG LOCAL INTEREST IN ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL CEMETERY IN WASHINGTON STATE. IN FACT, MY OFFICE RECENTLY HAS RECEIVED A TENTATIVE OFFER OF PUBLIC LAND FOR ESTABLISHING A CEMETERY IN MY STATE. STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED STRONG ENTHUSIASM AND SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPOSED SITE TO SUPPORT THE BURIAL NEEDS OF VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES. OFFICIALS FROM THE VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON STATE, AND KING COUNTY RECENTLY TOURED THE PROPOSED CEMETERY SITE AND WERE UNANIMOUSLY RECEPTIVE TO ITS POTENTIAL FOR A NATIONAL CEMETERY. MR. CHAIRMAN, I RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT THIS SUBCOMMITTEE GIVE ITS ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT TO THE CEMETERY PROPOSAL FOR THIS FAVORABLY-VIEWED SITE AND, BY SO DOING, ALLEVIATE FOR A TIME THE DEMANDS MADE UPON THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM.

MR. CHAIRMAN, I HAVE JOINED, WITH FULL RESPECT, WITH MY COLLEAGUES, MR. MCCAIN, MR. RUDD, MR. MCNULTY, MR. STUMP, AND MR. UDALL, IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 5988, TO EXPAND THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF VETERANS.

TESTIMONY OF
THE HONORABLE ELDON RUDD
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

OCTOBER 2, 1984

MR. CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE, I COME BEFORE YOU TODAY TO SHARE WITH YOU MY CONCERN AND THE CONCERN OF ARIZONA VETERANS ABOUT THE LACK OF A NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY IN ARIZONA.

LAST YEAR, WITH THE SUPPORT OF ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE ARIZONA CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION, THE AMERICAN LEGION, THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS AND THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS, I INTRODUCED H.R. 1906 -- A BILL TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY AT THE CURRENTLY EXISTING SITE OF THE ARIZONA VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY NEAR CAVE CREEK, ARIZONA --TO ADDRESS THIS CONCERN.

THOUGH THE NUMBER OF VETERANS IN ARIZONA HAS GROWN FROM ABOUT 250,000 IN 1970 TO ALMOST 400,000 TODAY, THERE IS

NO NATIONAL CEMETERY FOR VETERANS IN THE STATE. AT PRESENT, THE NATIONAL CEMETERY WITH AVAILABLE BURIAL SPACE, WHICH IS CLOSEST TO THE PHOENIX METROPOLITAN AREA, IS IN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA -- MORE THAN 300 MILES AWAY.

IN 1976, WITH THE HELP OF FEDERAL MATCHING FUNDS FROM THE P.L. 95-476 PROGRAM, THE STATE OF ARIZONA ESTABLISHED THE ARIZONA VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY IN MARICOPA COUNTY. THE SITE INCLUDES ABOUT 836 ACRES OF RAW DESERT LAND, AND ITS TERRAIN SUITS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM.

WHILE I APPRECIATE THE EXISTENCE OF A STATE VETERANS CEMETERY IN ARIZONA, I AM NEVERTHELESS CONCERNED THAT VETERANS WHO HAVE SERVED HONORABLY IN DEFENSE OF OUR NATION SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT AND OPPORTUNITY TO BE BURIED IN A NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY WITHIN A REASONABLE DISTANCE OF THEIR HOMES AND THEIR FAMILIES. LET ME EMPHASIZE THAT THE CEMETERY CLOSEST TO PHOENIX WITH AVAILABLE SPACE IS MORE THAN 300

39-585 O—84——6

MILES AWAY -- ABOUT A SIX HOUR DRIVE -- A VERY LONG DISTANCE FOR FAMILIES OF THOSE BURIED IN A NATIONAL CEMETERY TO HAVE TO TRAVEL TO VISIT THEIR LOVED ONES.

WHILE THERE IS A CURRENT NEED FOR A NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY, ARIZONA'S POPULATION IS EXPECTED TO DOUBLE BY THE YEAR 2000, INDICATING AN EVEN GREATER NEED TO ADDRESS THE DIMINISHING BURIAL SPACE AVAILABLE IN EXISTING NATIONAL CEMETERIES.

THE ARIZONA SITE HAS SPACE FOR ABOUT 500,000 INTERNMENTS, MAKING IT ONE OF THE LARGEST IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IF IT IS SO DESIGNATED. WITH THE DIMINISHING SPACE AVAILABLE IN THE PRESENT SYSTEM, THIS IS AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION.

I URGE THE COMMITTEE'S FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION OF ARIZONA VETERANS' CLEAR NEED AND DESIRE FOR A NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY IN ARIZONA.

IN THE WORDS OF MRS. DOROTHY BAGG, A CONSTITUENT OF MINE FROM SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA, WHOSE HUSBAND IS BURIED IN THE CURRENTLY EXISTING ARIZONA VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY,

MAKING THE SITE A NATIONAL CEMETERY WOULD REPRESENT "A SOURCE OF GREAT PRIDE FOR ALL ARIZONANS AS WELL AS GIVE US A FEELING OF WELL-BEING FOR HELPING THOSE WHO HAD HELPED US".

I THANK THE MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE FOR YOUR THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION.

STATEMENT OF

PAUL T. BANNAI

CHIEF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

DEPARTMENT OF MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 2, 1984

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Harry N. Walters, I thank you for the privilege to appear before the committee this morning.

Your letter of September 6, 1984, expresses interest in the effectiveness of regional cemeteries and the State Cemetery Grants program in meeting existing and future burial needs.

The regional cemetery concept grew out of efforts in the early 1970's to reverse a non-expansionist policy that had been in effect for several years regarding national cemeteries. The National Cemeteries Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-43), which established the National Cemetery System in the

2.

Veterans Administration, called for a comprehensive study concerning "criteria which govern the development and operation of the National Cemetery System including the concept of regional cemeteries."

This study, which was submitted to Congress in January 1974, explored three basic alternatives. The first was to continue the existing system and number of cemeteries. This was the least expensive approach, but quite restrictive in terms of service delivery. The second alternative was to establish a national cemetery in each state. The study determined that this approach was unrealistic, due to prohibitive costs. The third approach, and the one which VA and the Congress agreed to implement, was to establish a large cemetery in each of the ten standard Federal regions plus one in the Washington, D.C. area. This would provide for a significant expansion of the National Cemetery System, would improve the distribution of burial spaces throughout the United States, and would provide a realistic approach to meeting future burial needs.

In 1983, the Department of Memorial Affairs achieved the regional objectives outlined in the 1974 National Cemetery Study. Ten of the eleven cemeteries called for are open for burials, and the final one, at Ft. Mitchell, Alabama, will be completed in October 1986. The regional cemeteries are clearly servicing a large number of veterans and will continue to do so. We are currently assessing the effectiveness of the regional cemetery concept in meeting present and future burial needs, and will provide the results of our study to the Committee as soon as they are finalized.

3.

In Fiscal Year 1983, the regional cemeteries which had then been established, accomplished over 45% of all interments in the National Cemetery System. This proportion will continue to rise as the more recently established regional cemeteries become fully operational.

The National Cemetery Study of 1974 also called for a State Cemetery Grants program to complement the regional cemetery concept. This would encourage state development of veterans cemeteries to accommodate those who prefer to be buried closer to home. Under this program, VA makes grants to the States on a 50-50 matching basis to assist them in establishing, expanding, or improving state veterans' cemeteries.

The VA has made a continuous and aggressive effort to publicize this program. So far, funds totaling $9.9 million have been obligated in support of 16 applications, and 11 grants totaling $4.9 million, have been awarded to seven states. During 1983, approximately 2,300 veterans and dependents were buried in VA grant supported state cemeteries.

A new state-owned and operated veterans cemetery at Middletown, Conn., near Hartford, will be established with the aid of a $682,143 matching fund grant made in 1984 through this program. Connecticut joins six states -- Maryland, Illinois, Maine, Rhode Island, Arizona and Wyoming -- which have shared in veterans cemetery grants.

4.

Public Law 98-233 extended the grants program for an additional 5 years beyond the original delimiting date. The VA will continue to seek ways to enhance the awareness, participation and effectiveness of the State Cemetery Grants program.

In addition to implementing the regional cemetery concept and administering the State Cemetery Grants program, VA has sought cost-effective ways to expand existing national cemeteries, where possible, and to reopen those that have been closed to new interments.

- o Engineering studies are being conducted to reclaim land in existing cemeteries that was previously considered unusable. Bay Pines National Cemetery reopened on July 2, 1984, after almost 20 years in a closed status, and similar action is planned for Knoxville, Zachary Taylor, New Albany, Little Rock, and Los Angeles National Cemeteries.

- o A new "garden niche" concept allows interment of cremated remains in small plots that utilize land unsuitable for casket burials. Four cemeteries in California that were previously completely closed to new interments can now accept cremated remains by using this concept. Cremation is becoming increasingly well accepted in this country. Garden niches will provide an excellent means of responding to this need, and will be established at every national cemetery currently in a closed status.

5.

- Expansion of some existing cemeteries has been made possible through acceptance of donated land that is adjacent and otherwise suitable for gravesite development. In recent years, donated land has enabled the following national cemeteries among others to expand: Florence National Cemetery in South Carolina; Bath National Cemetery in New York; Barrancas National Cemetery in Florida; Wood National Cemetery in Wisconsin; and Grafton National Cemetery in West Virginia.

- Implementation of a smaller 4' x 8' grave size is another initiative which will enable national cemeteries to serve a larger number of veterans and their families. Prior to 1982 the standard grave size in national cemeteries was 5' x 10'. The standard size in the private sector is 3' x 8'. By using a smaller grave size, national cemeteries save 18 square feet (36%) on each grave. This allows more efficient use of a critical resource - land - and will permit more veterans and their families to participate in the national cemetery benefit at the location of their choice.

The Veterans Administration is also providing for the burial needs of veterans through establishment of two new national cemeteries. These are at Ft. Richardson, Alaska, where the VA took over an Army Post cemetery this year, and in Central Florida, where construction of a new cemetery will be completed in May 1987.

6.

The Department of Memorial Affairs is keenly aware of the demands which an aging veteran population may place on the National Cemetery System in the coming decades. We will continue to seek innovative ways of achieving our most important operational goal - which is to provide sufficient gravesites to meet the burial needs of veterans and eligible family members.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you again, sir, on behalf of Harry N. Walters, Administrator of Veterans Affairs, for the opportunity to appear before you and your Subcommittee today.

THE NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"STRENGTH IN UNITY"

Statement of

Richard W. Johnson
Director of Legislative Affairs

before the

Subcommittee on Housing and
Memorial Affairs

on

National Cemetery System

October 2, 1984

NATIONAL CAPITAL OFFICE
219 N. Washington Street • Alexandria, VA 22314 • Tele: (703) 549-0311

The mission of the Veterans Administration's Memorial Affairs Division is: "To insure that the memorial affairs of eligible veterans are appropriately provided for and conducted in a dignified manner which recognizes the honorable status of veterans."

NCOA fully supports this mission and applauds the VA's Memorial Affairs Division for its efforts to provide appropriate grave-sites and cemeteries to honor deceased veterans and their immediate families. The accomplishments made over the past eleven (11) years, since the enactment of the National Cemeteries Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-43), are commendable. NCOA also salutes the Committees on Veterans Affairs for their concern for and support of the National Cemetery System.

CEMETERY EXPANSION

NCOA has some issues it wishes to bring to the attention of this panel. To begin, it is apparent the current regional cemetery concept, as provided in P.L. 93-43, will be inadequate as the veterans' population ages and future burial needs increase significantly. Additionally, VA experience indicates veterans and their survivors prefer to have the veteran buried close to home.

There are currently 28 million living veterans of our nation's armed forces. About 395,000 will die this year. Mortality rates are increasing about 14,000 each year. In another decade, an estimated 4 million or more veterans' deaths will have occurred in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Comparatively, the current National Cemetery System (as of Sep. 30, 1983) has 65,648 gravesites reserved, 320,000 available for internment, 27,000 in-ground sites for cremains and 15,400 columbarium niches. Potential gravesites, including undeveloped acreage in cemeteries not yet open for interments, amount to over three million.

Of major concern is that many of the states having the largest veterans' populations have too few national cemeteries available for interments. California, for example, has but one of five cemeteries, Riverside, available for in-ground interments. Florida has one of three and Texas has but three of its six available. Still, the number of graves, in-ground sites for cremains and niches available as of Sep. 30, 1983, were 14,751 for California, 4,565 for Florida and 5,476 for Texas.

Consequently, the availability of interment spaces will become more acute as we enter the 1990s. Although the VA and some veterans' organizations are attempting to influence the states to establish more cemeteries under the State Cemetery Grant Program, relatively few have shown any interest. It, thus, appears the federal government will either have to expand the National Cemetery System or take some action to influence more states to establish veterans' cemeteries within their respective boundaries.

It is NCOA's understanding that the Veterans Administration's Memorial Affairs Branch has completed a study on expanding the regional cemetery concept and, further, the study has been (or soon will be) widely distributed in Congress and to veterans' organizations, including NCOA. Our Association's representative, also a member of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials, has endorsed the study and recommends its adoption by this distinguished panel.

The study is the result of a recommendation to the VA by the advisory committee that because of the aging veterans' population, the original concept for regionalizing the National Cemetery System should be reviewed. The committee suggested that the Administrator alert Congress the VA would be studying an expansion of the system on the recommendation of the committee. NCOA subsequently endorsed the panel's recommendation as timely, as discussed above, and most appropriate in view of the widening preference to be interred in National cemeteries for veterans.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Section 1001, Chapter 24, Public Law 93-43, establishes an Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials. It directs the Administrator to appoint the committee membership and "consult with the committee from time to time in respect to the administration of the cemeteries, etc."

For the two immediate past fiscal years the committee has met but three times-only once in all of FY 1984. Such a significantly small number of meetings appear to be contrary to the needs of the National Cemetery System. For example, during FY 1984 this panel conducted hearings on the headstones and markers issue. True, the advisory committee briefly had addressed the subject during its final 1983 meeting but not to the extent there would be congressional interests, hearings and proposals on the matter at a later date.

NCOA believes that if the advisory committee is to be effective and, most importantly, be a voice for the nation's veterans, it should meet a minimum of two times each fiscal year. In this respect, the Association urges Congress to amend the effective section to direct the Administrator to schedule meetings at least semi-annually unless the Administrator, in concert with the advisory committee chairman, justifies in writing to the Chairman, House Committee on Veterans Affairs, there is no necessity to conduct one of the two annual meetings.

NCOA also urges Congress to further amend the subject section to require the timely submission of reports of meetings of the Advisory Committee to Congress. NCOA believes three (3) months or ninety (90) days following the committee's adjournment date is a reasonable, yet timely period for the submission of the reports.

CASKETS AND GRAVELINERS

NCOA believes that all future interments in national cemeteries should be done requiring bodies to be delivered at the cemeteries in caskets of minimum standards as prescribed by the Veterans Administration. NCOA is concerned and dismayed that some bodies of our veterans are brought to VA cemeteries in no more than body bags. This is no way to honor a veteran regardless of the financial status of the veteran or next-of-kin. Our veterans deserve an honorable burial.

Further, NCOA recommends that all future graves in national cemeteries have graveliners. These liners preserve the sight of burial and, in the long run, reduce the costs of refills to retain the proper level of the ground immediately above and to the sides of the grave. The average national cost per graveliner is $85.

NCOA urges Congress to authorize minimum standards for caskets and graveliners for future burials and, subsequently authorize adequate annual appropriations for the graveliners.

HEADSTONES AND MARKERS

The House already has adopted legislation relative to the use of upright headstones in VA National Cemeteries. Since the Senate may not act on this issue before the 98th Congress adjourns sine die, NCOA offers a few remarks concerning the subject which may be of importance to the panel at a later date.

The VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials recently reaffirmed the panel's 1976 recommendation to use only flat-markers in all new national cemeteries to identify the remains of veterans and their eligible next-of-kin. Reportedly, the committee's reaffirmation is based on (1) uniformity of gravesites, (2) costs and (3) the overwhelming requests for flat markers in comparison with those for uprights.

The panel did consider the veterans' preference as a major factor in reaffirming its earlier decision. It also considered that more and more private cemeteries have been and are now using only flat markers with few complaints from veterans or their next-of-kin. Currently, nearly 90 percent of all veterans continue to be buried in private cemeteries.

NCOA also has considered these issues and those brought to the attention of this committee from veterans organizations in states having considerable snowfall during the winter season. Their complaint was that flat markers were covered by snow making it difficult for visitors to identify the gravesite of a loved one. An investigation of this charge proved the complaint to be valid; however, it was also discovered that most snowfalls occurring in the far northern states not only covered the flat markers but the uprights as well. Further, the number of visitors coming to the affected cemeteries during periods of snow coverage were minimal.

NCOA reviewed the cost-factors. Purchase and maintenance of uprights were greater than for flat markers. With renewed interest by veterans and families to have the veteran buried in a national cemetery, the costs of burials will increase significantly in future years. With the use of graveliners, which NCOA has recommended, the costs will be even greater; however, annual maintenance costs per grave should even this out or probably, save monies in the future, providing flat markers are used exclusively in all new cemeteries.

Earlier this year, NCOA testified it favored upright headstones over flat markers. It did so because the Association, having a majority of active duty and retired military personnel as members, preferred to be buried in a military-style cemetery. Only upright headstones provide this type of scenic beauty. NCOA continues to believe upright headstones offer a greater visibility of uniformity and tradition than flat markers.

NCOA representatives have viewed some of the new cemeteries being acquired by the VA. In each case, the natural beauty of the land has been retained. In some sections, set aside for burials, the areas are separated by trees where one is not in sight of the other. There could be sections designated for both flat markers and uprights without disturbing the uniformity of the other. If Congress does direct the VA to provide uprights on request, it should be with the understanding that the veteran must be buried in the section that has been designated for the type of marker desired. And, too, that once the decision is made that any subsequent change of mind to switch markers would entail reinterment of the body and the purchase of the new marker all at the cost of the eligible person requesting the change.

EQUITABLE ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility requirements for interment in the VA's National Cemeteries are not always consistent or equitable. For example, it is NCOA's understanding that the Veterans Administration permits the interment of a veteran who has an earlier discharge from the armed forces under honorable conditions but later receives a discharge under dishonorable conditions, providing there was a break in active duty between enlistments or periods of service. On the other hand, a veteran who has no break in military service may have one or more earlier discharges for honorable service but ends his or her active service under dishonorable conditions, that veteran is not eligible for interment.

NCOA believes there should be strict standards of eligibility for interments and they should be fair and equitable to our veterans. NCOA, however, is opposed to granting eligibility to any veteran whose character of military service was not honorable.

Nevertheless, NCOA urges Congress to amend the eligibility regulations prescribed in section 1002, P.L. 93-43, to:

a. allow any veteran with an honorable discharge for any period of military service during a war or hostile action in which the U.S. was involved to be interred regardless of any previous or subsequent discharge under less than honorable conditions.

NCOA has no strong objections if others wish to expand on this recommendation. NCOA asks only that the regulations be fair and equitable to all veterans.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

STATEMENT OF

JAMES N. MAGILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION CEMETERY SYSTEM

WASHINGTON, D. C. OCTOBER 2, 1984

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the privilege of presenting to this distinguished Subcommittee the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States with respect to the National Cemetery System as administered by the Department of Memorial Affairs of the Veterans Administration.

Mr. Chairman, the very rapidly aging veteran population is not only providing a challenge to the VA's health care system, but will also have a severe impact on the Department of Memorial Affairs' ability to provide for a veterans burial in a national cemetery. By 1990 veterans over the age 65 will make up more than a quarter of the

population, and by the year 2000 the percentage will be in excess of one third. This rapid aging of the veteran population will continue until 2010 when its expected to exceed 12 million. Inasmuch as interment in a national cemetery is available to all veterans discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, the crucial planning and timely implementation to expand and/or better utilize existing resources and programs must be aggressively pursued so veterans will not be denied burial in a national cemetery within a reasonable distance from their survivors.

For a number of years the VFW has been mandated by Resolution to seek the establishment of an open national cemetery in every state. Because a great number of national cemeteries are closed, the survivors of eligible veterans are forced either to seek the veterans interment far from home or through other sources, generally at greater expense. It is our understanding twelve states do not have any national cemetery. They are: Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming. Moreover, in five of the states that have at least one national cemetery, first family casketed interments are no longer being accepted. Alabama, Arizona, and Maine each have one cemetery and they are all closed; New Jersey, two, and they are closed; and Maryland, three, which are closed! We believe that providing an open national cemetery in every state is the responsibility of the federal government inasmuch as veterans were inducted into military service by that government.

Mr. Chairman, it is our understanding the Veterans Administration's objective of establishing one large national cemetery in each of the ten Standard Federal Regions and one close to Washington, D. C. will be completed in 1986 with the dedication of the Ft. Mitchell National Cemetery in Alabama. We are pleased this project is nearing completion. However, we strongly question to what extent these cemeteries will be utilized by veterans who do not reside in relatively close proximity to them.

Mr. Chairman, in our invitation to appear before this distinguished Subcommittee you requested our comments on the State Cemetery Grant Program. As you know, this program authorizes the Administrator of Veterans Affairs to provide financial assistance on a 50-50 matching basis to states that wish to establish, improve, or expand their veterans' cemeteries, with any state being eligible to apply for such financial assistance for those purposes. Information available to us indicates approximately 33 states have expressed some degree of interest in the program with only about eleven states actually submitting applications. We support this program and encourage the individual states to take advantage of it since it certainly compliments the national cemetery system in providing a cost-effective partial solution to the increasing demand on the VA to provide burial space; however, as stated previously our primary concern is for an open national cemetery in every state.

Finally Mr. Chairman, we wish to commend the House Veterans Affairs Committee for reporting and the U. S. House of Representatives

for passing HR 5617, the "Veterans Housing Amendments of 1984," which in part provides that new grave markers in national cemeteries be upright except in specific instances where flat markers are requested by either the veteran or his or her survivors. This provision addresses our current resolution entitled "Oppose The VA Policy Which Provides For The Exclusive Use Of Flat Grave Markers."

This concludes my testimony. Appended to my statement are copies of our resolutions pertinent to this hearing. I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Resolution No. 625

TO PROVIDE FOR AN OPEN NATIONAL CEMETERY IN EVERY STATE

WHEREAS, there are many states and regions of the United States without an open National Cemetery facility; and

WHEREAS, Federal and State land ideally suited for cemetery development is available in many states; and

WHEREAS, veterans should be entitled to burial in a National Cemetery reasonably close to their homes; and

WHEREAS, VA's current policy of regionalization does not always assure that eligible deceased veterans can be interred close to their families; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 85th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation to provide for at least one open National Cemetery in each state to assure that all veterans may be buried in a National Cemetery reasonably close to their homes.

Adopted by the 85th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Chicago, Illinois, August 17-24, 1984.

Resolution No. 625

Resolution No. 732

OPPOSE THE USE OF 4' X 8' GRAVE SITES IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES

WHEREAS, the VA has adopted the policy of burying veterans and their dependents in 4' x 8' grave sites, and that this reduction in size from the 5' x 10' plot was implemented in order to save space in the limited available national cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, the 5' x 10' grave site is the narrowest plot which will permit sequential excavation as used in the national cemetery service; and

WHEREAS, when upright grave markers are erected sequentially on 4' x 8' grave sites there is the esthetically offensive effect of creating the appearance of a solid wall of stone; and

WHEREAS, grave markers must be placed on disturbed earth when erected on the 4' x 8' grave site totally precluding the use of upright markers due to the consequent severe sinking and tilting; and

WHEREAS, flat grave markers placed on these smaller grave sites are also subject to sinking and tilting resulting in a esthetically displeasing appearance and increased maintenance cost; and

WHEREAS, the use of the 4' x 8' grave site precludes third and fourth interments resulting in increased costs and the waste of valuable space; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 85th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we seek the immediate discontinuance of the use of 4' x 8' grave sites and the restoration of the 5' x 10' grave site in our national cemeteries.

Adopted by the 85th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Chicago, Illinois, August 17-24, 1984.

Resolution No. 732

Resolution No. 733

OPPOSE THE VA POLICY WHICH PROVIDES FOR THE
EXCLUSIVE USE OF FLAT GRAVE MARKERS

WHEREAS, the VA has adopted the policy of the exclusive use of flat grave markers in our national cemeteries for the purpose of reducing procurement, installation and maintenance costs; and

WHEREAS, flat grave markers may only be properly and effectively employed in such climatic regions where they will not become buried in snow or otherwise rendered inaccessible, and where the type of ground does not provide an adequate foundation to sufficiently support an upright marker; and

WHEREAS, flat grave markers do not present the orderly and appropriately martial appearance of comrades in arms standing shoulder to shoulder as do upright markers and as preferred by the Veterans of Foreign Wars; and

WHEREAS, the policy of providing flat markers exlusively deprives veterans and their dependents of their due right to choice and that this policy is therefore prejudicial in the extreme; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 85th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that the policy of providing flat grave markers exclusively be immediately discontinued and that all national cemeteries be apportioned, with due consideration to climate and regional preferences, so that both upright and flat markers may be provided as dictated by the veteran's or his or her dependent's request; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all flat markers employed in national cemeteries perforce of the above listed VA policy now be subject to the election of upright markers and that if such an election is made that it be implemented with alacrity and with no expense or inconvenience for the elector.

Adopted by the 85th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Chicago, Illinois, August 17-24, 1984.

Resolution No. 733

STATEMENT OF
DAVID W. GORMAN
ASSISTANT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING
AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
OCTOBER 2, 1984

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 854,000 members of the Disabled American Veterans, may I say that we certainly appreciate this opportunity to present our views relating to the VA National Cemetery System and the State Cemetery Grant Program and their importance towards meeting present and future burial needs of this nation's veterans.

Initially, Mr. Chairman, we commend you and the members of the Subcommittee for this timely exercise of your legislative oversight function and we are hopeful our remarks will prove beneficial in your deliberations.

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, the VA operates and maintains the National Cemetery System as a result of Public Law 93-43 which, in 1973, consolidated 82 Department of the Army National Cemeteries, 32 burial plots and monuments sites and 21 VA hospital cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the Veterans Administration into the National Cemetery System.

Today the system consists of 109 cemeteries located in 38 states and Puerto Rico. Of the total number of National Cemeteries, 51 are closed for additional interments. 58 National Cemeteries are open with approximately 320,000 gravesites available with potential gravesites, including undeveloped acreage, in cemeteries not yet open for interment approximating 3½ million.

Mr. Chairman, by 1990 only 46 National Cemeteries are projected to be open and by the year 2000 only 41 National Cemeteries are expected to be open for interment of veterans.

It is interesting to note that seven states contain only closed cemeteries leaving 31 states and Puerto Rico with the 58 open cemeteries. However, the distribution of those open cemeteries is rather uneven.

For example, the states of Illinois (5), North Carolina (4), Tennessee (4), Texas (3), Arkansas (3), Kentucky (3) and Mississippi (3) contain 25 of the open cemeteries in the system with the remaining 33 open cemeteries distributed among the other 31 states and Puerto Rico.

Simply stated, Mr. Chairman, there are 19 states with either no National Cemetery or the National Cemetery within that state is closed.

Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to note that the Fort Mitchell, Alabama, National Cemetery should be operational in 1986 and that plans are progressing concerning the creation of a new National Cemetery in Florida scheduled to open in 1988.

It is our impression that the expansion of the National Cemetery System is based on the VA's philosophy that one National Cemetery should be constructed and available for interments in each of the ten designated federal regions and the Washington, D.C. area.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, the DAV holds the view that the regional concept of expansion is too restrictive and not realistically attuned with the long-range aspects of our nation's veterans burial needs.

Our organization, in accordance with a resolution adopted by the delegates to our most recent National Convention, believes that expansion of the system should be based upon a policy which contains the ultimate goal of providing at least one open National Cemetery in each state. Every eligible veteran, we feel, should have the right to seek burial in a National Cemetery that is reasonably close to the area in which he/she lives to facilitate personal maintenance and visitation by survivors.

Mr. Chairman, an issue that has been and will continue to be the topic of much conversation is the impact the aging veteran will place on the Veterans Administration.

Among the many challenges that confront the VA in meeting the needs of the aging veteran the Department of Memorial Affairs has not escaped mention.

Contained within the recently released aging report "Caring for the Older Veteran," the Department of Memorial Affairs has established the goal--"to provide sufficient grave sites, appropriately located, to meet the need for burial of increasing numbers of veterans and their family members." (emphasis added)

The strategies to meet that goal include:

By 1990, provide sufficient capacity, acceptably located for National Cemetery interment to 57,000 veterans, spouses and dependents, and by 2000, provide for interment of up to 100,000 such individuals, annually.

By 1990, through acquisition of small parcels of adjacent land, expand the capacity of existing sites to support or restore open status in 11 sites.

By 1990, complete conversion to cost-effective gravesite dimensions and apply the garden niche concept for cremations to all cemeteries to maximize use of available space.

By 1990, expand the number of states developing cemeteries under the matching grant program from 9 to 20 and by 2000, to 30.

By 1995, provide for burial space for eligible veterans in all of the ten most populous metropolitan areas.

We believe that in the long term with the rapidly aging veteran population and with the growth and shift in our nation's population centers, a National Cemetery in every state is a realistic necessity.

In this regard, it is important to note that during Fiscal Year 1983 there were 44,684 interments in National Cemeteries compared to 41,422 interments during Fiscal Year 1982--an increase of nearly 8%.

Furthermore, it is projected that about nine million veterans will expire between now and the year 2000 equating to approximately 600,000 deaths per year. Additionally, there are approximately 90 million veterans, spouses and eligible dependents who are potentially entitled to services from the Department of Memorial Affairs.

In terms of people served and the budget allocated the Department of Memorial Affairs, under the direction of Mr. Paul Bannai, has grown appreciably over the years. We are hopeful that a continuation of that growth will continue in the future.

We trust that you will give serious consideration to these thoughts, Mr. Chairman, and urge the Subcommittee to advocate expansion of the system on a state-by-state basis.

STATE CEMETERIES GRANT PROGRAM

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to express our appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, and all the members of the Veterans Affairs Committee for the passage of legislation earlier this year--Public Law 98-223--which provided for an extension--through Fiscal Year 1989--of the State Matching Grant Program for establishing, expanding or improving State Veterans Cemeteries.

As you know, the State Cemetery Grant Program compliments the VA's National Cemetery System by providing a 50/50 matching grant to states who wish to build their own cemetery.

The State Cemetery Grant Program became operational on October 1, 1979. As of September 30, 1983 the VA had received 20 requests from 11 states requesting 9.8 million dollars. Of the funds requested, approximately 8.1 million dollars has been obligated in support of construction projects.

Mr. Chairman, we would suggest to the Subcommittee that greater utilization of the matching grants to state programs for construction, expansion or improvement of State Veteran Cemeteries may very well be one viable avenue by which the federal government can offset the cost of new National Cemetery construction and, at the same time, meet veterans' burial needs. Additionally, this will provide the states with an opportunity to share in this nation's obligation to veterans.

That completes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. Again, I wish to thank you and the members of the Subcommittee for allowing the Disabled American Veterans to present its views on these most important subjects.

STATEMENT OF

STEPHEN L. MORGAN
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
THE AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

EXPANSION OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

OCTOBER 2, 1984

AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION
Three Skyline Place, Suite 1111, 5201 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, Virginia 22041 • (703) 379-5838

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Cemetery Association (ACA) is a national trade association which represents over 2,300 members including municipal, religious, non-profit and for-profit cemeteries. The ACA respectfully submits its views on a proposed expansion of the National Cemetery System and requests that this statement be made part of the record of today's hearing.

Federal cemeteries were established during the Civil War as memorials to Union battlefield casualties. Through the years, the original concept was expanded to include the interment and memorialization of veterans, their spouses, and dependent children. Since at least 1945, Congress has been urged by various veterans' organizations to expand the number of federal cemeteries partly because of the large numbers of veterans who fought (and died) in World War II, the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

In 1973, President Nixon signed into law P.L. 93-43 which established the National Cemetery System and brought it under the jurisdiction of the Veterans Administration. In addition, Section 903 of P.L. 93-43 authorized the VA to pay "a sum not exceeding $150.00 for a plot (or interment allowance) to each eligible veteran" who preferred interment in non-government cemeteries. In fiscal year 1983, 44,684 burials took place in national cemeteries. The VA projects an estimated 57,000 burials by 1990 and 66,000 annually by the year 2000.

The anticipated increase in interments has led VA officials to state that future veterans burial needs cannot be met within the existing National Cemetery System. However, the solution proposed by the VA is to perpetuate the present system by increasing the number of cemeteries, which in turn will require significant new funding for development, maintenance, and increased personnel needs. And while the number of interments in national cemeteries may gradually increase until the year 2000, we predict that significantly less interments will take place sometime shortly after the turn of the century because veterans eligible for interment in federal cemeteries would begin to diminish for a variety of reasons.

While interments in national cemeteries are expected to decrease sometime after the year 2000, the expense of maintaining and operating each national cemetery will continue to escalate past that time, the cost of which is borne by the American taxpayer. By contrast, virtually every state has

laws which require private cemeteries to place a portion of the sale price of each burial lot into an irrevocable care fund, the income from which is to be used solely for the maintenance of the cemetery. In this manner, private cemeteries become financially self-sustaining long after they have reached their capacity.

The VA has recognized that most veterans do not wish to be interred more than 50 miles from their homes and families, but it has interpreted this as justification for additional national cemeteries. Ignored is the fact that many veterans and their dependents prefer interment in private or consecrated cemeteries where family members have already been interred and memorialized.

The ACA believes that an effective VA burial program should encompass a veteran's preference for interment anywhere in the country, and in any kind of cemetery he or she wishes. The VA's own statistics provide an indication of the extent to which veterans prefer interment in non-federal cemeteries. In FY 1983, 279,115 eligible veterans or their families received the VA plot allowance of $150.00. The figure contrasts sharply with the 44,684 recipients, as mentioned above, who chose interment in VA cemeteries.

The VA projection for FY 1984 estimates a total of 46,000 burials in government cemeteries and 320,200 plot allowances for interment in non-government cemeteries. Compared to its FY 1983 figures, this means that the VA expects a 3 percent increase in its own interments but, more importantly, a 15 percent increase in interments of veterans in non-federal cemeteries.

Despite these statistics, VA officials have taken the position that the National Cemetery System should be expanded to accommodate a presumed "need" for veterans desiring interment in government cemeteries. The American Cemetery Association continues to contend that veterans and taxpayers would be far better served by the VA using its scarce resources on the demonstrated preference by veterans for interment in private non-federal cemeteries. Expansion of the National Cemetery System should be reserved only for locations where veterans' preference for such interment can be factually established.

Another factor which should be given serious consideration by Congress in any contemplated expansion of the National Cemetery System is the extent to which private sector cemeteries are already serving the needs of the veterans' community in a given geographic area. Many private cemeteries have established fields of honor or specific sections to pay homage to the veteran. In addition, some cemeteries offer significantly reduced charges to veterans in consideration of the veterans' service to the nation. Where these cemeteries do exist, the establishment of a government cemetery is not only duplicative but is wasteful of funding which could be applied to other more critical veterans programs.

The plot allowance of $150.00, referred to above, has remained the same over the eleven years since P.L. 93-43 was enacted. Since 1973, the

VA's own cost of making interments has increased while the inflation factor has affected the cost of nearly everything. The ACA recommends that allowances granted to eligible veterans who do not choose interment in government cemeteries should be increased to properly reflect the true cost of interment and memorialization in 1984 and subsequent years. The American Cemetery Association believes, and presumably the Veterans Administration would agree, that no veteran should be forced to choose interment in a government cemetery because the plot and headstone allowances are too small to provide a genuine choice. Likewise, no veteran should receive reduced burial benefits because he or she chooses private interment for personal or religious reasons.

In conclusion, the members of the American Cemetery Association, many of whom are veterans themselves, believe that the various burial benefits administered by the VA should reflect as accurately as possible the genuine needs of our veteran population.

The American Legion

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★ 1608 "K" STREET, N.W. ★ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006 ★
(202) 861-2700 ★

For God and Country

October 4, 1984

Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Housing and
Memorial Affairs
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Congressman:

The American Legion did not appear and file a statement on October 2, at the Subcommittee hearing on the national cemetery system. May we please take this opportunity to present to the Subcommittee, through this letter to you, The American Legion's current perception of the operations of the national cemetery system.

What we want to say to the Subcommittee is that our organization is presently satisfied and pleased with the progress made in the operations of the national cemetery system since it was made the responsibility of the Veterans Administration in 1973.

The American Legion has supported the concept of the Regional Cemeteries, recognizing that it appears to be presently impractical to attempt to institute a policy of a national cemetery in every state. While there are many veterans who would like to have a cemetery in every state, the Legion recognizes the problems, both logistical and fiscal that would follow the establishment of such a national policy. Also, it must be expected the demographic profile of the veteran population will continue to change, and for that reason also, it seems to us the regional concept now in place is the most practical way for the Federal Government to offer the possibility of national cemetery burial to the greatest possible number of veterans.

The American Legion supported the legislation that established the state veterans' cemetery matching grant program, and we believe our support has been well justified by the progress of that program. A number of states now have veterans' cemeteries, established with the help of the Federal matching grant. Some states have more than

one cemetery already functioning, and a number of additional states are interested and in some instances actively preparing to establish a veterans' cemetery.

In our service work, we have assisted families to arrange burial of a family member in various of the state cemeteries, and we can attest these families are well satisfied and proud to have their veteran member rest with his comrades in the lovely and peaceful settings that have been developed by the states. So far we have not been made aware of any instances of neglect or inadequate maintenance in the state cemeteries. Should that happen, we are confident our state American Legion organizations would initiate remedial action.

The maintenance and operations of the national cemetery system are universally excellent. We believe the national cemeteries now in place and functioning are a testament to the American peoples' desire to honor their veterans beyond life and into their final resting places.

We are pleased with the expansion policies now underway, with the recent dedication of the cemeteries at Battle Creek, Michigan, Quantico, Virginia, and the plans for establishment of cemeteries at Fort Mitchell, Alabama, and in Florida. We are also pleased that the Veterans Administration is pursuing a policy of accepting donations of land where such land is contiguous to an existing cemetery, and where such land is suitable for use as burial sites. We believe this aspect of the VA program will permit the continued operation of a number of existing cemeteries that would otherwise be closed to further burials.

We believe the present Administrator and Chief Memorial Affairs Director are working positively and constructively to improve and expand the national cemetery system, within the guidelines provided by the Congress. The objective is as it was stated by President Lyndon Johnson some years ago when he said that every veteran should have the honor and privilege of burial in a national cemetery within a reasonable distance from his/her place of residence at time of death. With the establishment of new cemeteries as now scheduled, with expansion of existing cemeteries where and as possible, and with the establishment of state veterans' cemeteries with matching Federal grants, The American Legion believes the present program should indeed make it possible for virtually all veterans to choose burial in a veterans' cemetery when they wish to do so.

The American Legion is supportive of all these activities, and will continue to lend its support and encouragement to VA and to the

Committees of Congress, with continued expression of appreciation to the Congress for its compassion and concern for the nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

R. E. Lynch

R. E. LYNCH, Director
National Veterans Affairs and
Rehabilitation Commission

STATEMENT OF
THE VETERANS OF WORLD WAR 1
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, INCORPORATED

FOR THE RECORD

BY

JOHN PAVLIK
NATIONAL COMMANDER

AND

HERBERT M. HOUSTON
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

October 2, 1984

"IT'S AN HONOR TO BE A BUDDY TO A BUDDY"

Mr. Chairman and Members of this Distinguished Committee, it is an honor for the Veterans of World War One of the U.S.A., Inc., to submit this statement for the record.

It was not until the Civil War, when the number of deaths which exceeded previous wars, that the idea of providing proper burial for casualties was first considered. President Lincoln in 1862, signed an act authorizing the establishment of national cemeteries, "...for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country." Twelve cemeteries were established as a result of this legislation.

The Veterans of World War One of the U.S.A., Inc., have always supported programs regarding the National Cemetery System. We were recently advised that Mr. John Pavlik, the National Commander of the Veterans of World War One, was the only National Commander of the veteran's organizations to be in attendance for the Fort Custer Cemetery dedication program at Augusta, Michigan, September 23, 1984.

This type of dedication by our National Organization reinforces our steadfast commitment to continue our support of the programs established by the Department of Memorial Affairs in Washington, D.C.

It is through this Memorial Affairs agency that all veterans, regardless of heroism, race, creed, or rank, are equal. The National Cemetery System has made great progress in fulfilling its mission to the men and women who served in the Armed Forces.

Mr. Chairman, the Veterans of World War One thank you and your fine Committee for this opportunity to present this statement.

"IT'S AN HONOR TO BE A BUDDY TO A BUDDY"

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